

BERNAL DÍAZ
THE CONQUEST OF
NEW SPAIN

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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PENGUIN BOOKS

The Flight from Mexico

some farms and isolated houses belonging to a large town named Cuauhtitlan¹ (after the capture of Mexico these were awarded to Alonso de Avila), and though the Mexicans yelled and shouted at us, hurling stones, darts, and arrows, we withstood it all. From there we went past some houses and shacks with the Mexicans still following us, and, as many of them had now collected, they endeavoured to slaughter us. Beginning to surround us, they hurled stones from their slings and darts and arrows; and at a difficult pass they attacked us with their broad-swords, killing two of our soldiers and one horse, and wounding almost all the rest. But with cut and thrust we killed several of them, and our horsemen accounted for several more. Having slept in these houses and eaten the horse they killed, we resumed our march early next morning, sending half the horsemen ahead. But when we reached a plain about three miles further on and were beginning to think we could march on in safety, our scouts rode back from the country they had reconnoitred to tell us that the fields were full of Mexican warriors who were lying in wait for us. Alarmed though we were by this news, we were not dismayed. Ready to meet them and fight them to the death, we halted for a little, while orders were given to the cavalry that they must charge and return rapidly, aiming at the enemies' faces until they had broken their ranks, and to us soldiers that we must drive our swords into their bellies and so most thoroughly avenge our dead and wounded comrades. Then, if God willed it, we should escape with our lives.

We saw them beginning to surround us. Our horsemen, charging in bands of five, broke their ranks. And then, commending ourselves most heartily to God and the Blessed Mary, and calling on the name of our patron St James, we charged them, all together.

It was a destructive battle, and a fearful sight to behold. We moved through the midst of them at the closest quarters, slashing and thrusting at them with our swords. And the dogs fought back furiously, dealing us wounds and death with their lances and their two-handed swords. And, the field being level, our

1. Possibly a slip of memory. The location is uncertain.

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horsemen speared them at their pleasure, charging and retiring and charging again. Although both they and their horses were wounded, they never stopped fighting, like the brave men they were. As for the rest of us who had no horses, we seemed all to be given double strength. For although we were wounded and now received fresh wounds, we did not stop to bind them up, for there was no time, but most courageously closed with the enemy, to stab them with our swords. I should like to describe the actions of Cortes, Cristobal de Olid, Gonzalo de Sandoval, Gonzalo Dominguez, and a certain Juan de Salamanca, who rode from one part of the field to the other breaking the enemy's ranks, although themselves badly wounded, and to record Cortes' instructions to us who were in the thick of the enemy that we must aim our cuts and thrusts at distinguished chieftains, who all wore great golden plumes and rich armour and devices.

We were marvellously encouraged also by the brave and bold Sandoval, who cried: 'Today gentlemen, is the day on which we are certain to win. Trust in God, and we shall come out of this alive, and to some purpose!' I must say once more that they killed and wounded many of our soldiers.

Now by God's grace, Cortes and the captains who rode with him came to the place where the commander-in-chief of the Mexicans marched with his banner displayed, in rich golden armour and high silver plumes, followed by his great band of warriors. And when Cortes saw him and other Mexican chieftains, all with high plumes, he said to his captains: 'Now gentlemen, let us cut our way through them, and leave none of them without a wound!' Then, commending themselves to God, our horsemen charged, and Cortes, riding straight for the Mexican commander, made him drop his banner, while the other captains succeeded in breaking the large bands of Indians who followed him. Cortes' charge had not thrown the Mexican down, but Juan de Salamanca, who rode beside our Captain on a piebald mare, dealt him a lance-thrust and snatched his rich plume. This he afterwards gave to Cortes, saying that it was his by right, since he had charged him first and made him drop his banner, thus depriving his followers of the courage to fight.

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However, three years afterwards His Majesty gave it to Salamanca as his coat of arms, and his descendants carry it on their saddle-cloths.

Let us return to the battle. When the Mexican commander and many other chiefs had been killed, it pleased the Lord that their attack should slacken. Then all our horsemen followed them, and we felt neither hunger nor thirst. It was as if we had suffered no disaster and undergone no hardships; we followed up our victory, dealing death and wounds, and our allies the Tlascalans became like very lions. With their swords, their two-handed blades, and other weapons which they had just captured, they fought most valiantly and well.

When our horsemen returned from following up our victory, we all gave great thanks to God for our escape from this mighty host. For never had there been seen throughout the Indies so many warriors assembled for any battle. All the flower of Mexico, of Texcoco, of all the towns around the lake, and of many others in the neighbourhood, was present, and the men of Otumba, Tepetzcucoc, and Saltocan, who all came in the belief that this time we should be totally destroyed. Their armour moreover was extremely rich, and decorated with much gold and many plumes and devices, and nearly all of them were chieftains or important persons. Near the spot where this famous and sternly contested battle was fought – for indeed it can be so described, since only by God's grace did we escape with our lives – stood the town of Otumba.

Interested readers will remember that when we went to the relief of Pedro de Alvarado in Mexico, we numbered in all thirteen hundred soldiers, including ninety-seven horsemen, eighty crossbowmen, and as many musketeers. In addition we had more than two thousand Tlascalans and we brought in many cannon. Now the day of our entry into Mexico was Midsummer Day 1520, and we escaped on 10 July of the same year; the battle of Otumba, as it was called, being fought on 14 July. But now, within a matter of days, in the battle of Mexico and on the bridges and causeways, and all the engagements, including that of Otumba and those on the road, more than eight hundred and sixty soldiers were killed and sacrificed,

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and seventy-two more, together with five Spanish women – all belonging to Narvaez' company – at the town of Tuxtepec, also a thousand Tlascalans. And if we come to consider it, none of us had much luck with his share of the gold we received, for if more of Narvaez' men than those of Cortes fell at the bridges it was because they were so weighed down by the stuff that they could neither run nor swim.

We marched along very cheerfully towards Tlascala, eating some gourds that they call *ayotes*, and the Mexican bands did not dare to collect and attack us from the small towns, although they still shouted at us from places where we could not get at them, and hurled stones, darts, and arrows at us, until we took refuge first in some farm buildings and then in a small town, where there was a good *cue* and a strong house in which we could spend the night. Here we dressed our wounds and got some rest. We were still followed by Mexican bands, however. But they dared not draw close, and those who came nearest seemed to say: 'There you go, out of our country!' From this small town where we rested we could see the hills above Tlascala, and the sight was as welcome to our eyes as if we had seen home. But how could we be sure that the Tlascalans would be loyal to us? What did we know of their attitude, or of the fate of the settlers at Villa Rica, whether they were alive or dead? Cortes said to us that although we were so few, only four hundred and forty of us surviving, with twenty horses, twelve crossbowmen, and seven musketeers – almost the same number as had followed him into Mexico in the first place – and though we had no powder and were all wounded, lamed, and maimed, we could clearly see that it had been Jesus Christ's pleasure to spare our lives, and that we must always give Him great thanks and honour.

With our scouts riding ahead of us, we reached a spring on the hillside where there were some walls and defences from ancient times, and our Tlascalan allies said that this was the boundary between them and the Mexicans. There, in welcome peace after the hardships we had gone through, we halted to wash and eat. Then quickly resuming our march, we reached the Tlascalan town of Hueyotlipan, where they received us

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and gave us food, though only a little, and this had to be paid for with some small pieces of gold and *chalchihuites* which some of us carried. Here we rested for a day.

When the news of our coming reached the capital of Tlascala, Mase Escasi, Xicotenga the Elder, Chichimecatecle, and many other *Caciques* and chieftains promptly came to us, accompanied by nearly all the inhabitants of Huexotzinco. On reaching the town where we were they advanced to embrace Cortes and the rest of us, and some of them were in tears. 'Oh Malinche, Malinche!' they cried. 'How grieved we are at your misfortunes and those of all your brothers, and at the number of our own people who have been killed with you! We told you so often not to trust the Mexicans, for one day they were sure to attack you, but you would not believe us. Now that it has happened all we can do is to tend your wounds and give you food. Consider yourselves at home. Rest, and we will return to our town and prepare quarters for you. Do not think it a small thing that you have escaped with your lives from that strong city and its bridges. If we thought of you as brave men before, we consider you much braver now. Many women in our towns will be mourning the death of sons, husbands, brothers, and kinsmen, but do not be disturbed by that. You owe much to your gods, who have brought you here and delivered you from the host of warriors who were waiting for you at Otumba. I knew four days before that they had gathered there to kill you. I wanted to go to your rescue with thirty thousand of our warriors, but I could not start because they had not yet assembled and were still being collected.'

Cortes and all our men embraced and thanked them. Cortes gave all the chieftains golden jewels and precious stones, and as every soldier had brought away all that he could, some of us gave presents out of what we had to the Indians we knew. How they rejoiced and how happy they seemed when they saw that Doña Luisa and Doña Marina were safe! And how sorrowfully they wept for the others who were absent and dead, especially Mase Escasi, who bewailed his daughter Doña Elvira and the death of Juan Velazquez de Leon, to whom he had given her.

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WHEN justice had been done on Antonio de Villafana and his fellow conspirators had quieted down, Cortes was informed that the launches were ready and their rigging and sails in place, that their oars were well made, and there were spare oars for each launch, and that the channels through which they were to pass had been deepened and broadened. He then sent a request to all friendly towns in the region of Texcoco to make eight thousand copper arrowheads each, to the standard of some patterns from Spain that had been sent round, and to make and trim for him eight thousand arrows of a good kind of wood, patterns of which had also been circulated; and he gave them a period of eight days in which to deliver the arrows and arrowheads to our camp. They brought them in the specified time, more than fifty thousand arrowheads and as many thousand arrows, the former better than their Spanish models, and these were divided among all the crossbowmen, who were told to polish, oil, and feather them. He also ordered the horsemen to have their horses shod and to get their lances ready, and to parade each day on horseback and gallop, and train their horses to turn quickly and to skirmish.

Then Cortes sent messengers with letters for our friend Xicotenga the Elder, and his son Xicotenga the Younger, and to his brothers, and to Chichimecatecle, informing them that after Corpus Christi we were going to set out against Mexico and blockade it. He told them to send twenty thousand warriors from Tlascala, Huexotzinco, and Cholula. For they were now all friends and comrades, and they all knew the time of meeting and the plan, he having sent them information by their own men, who were continually leaving our camp, laden with the spoils of our expeditions. Cortes also warned the people of Chalco and Tlamanalco and their vassals to be ready when he sent to summon them, and told them that we were going to invest Mexico, and when we should set out. He sent the same

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information to Don Fernando, the lord of Texcoco, and to his chieftains and vassals and to all the other towns friendly to us. All replied that they would obey his orders.

Then Cortes decided that on the second day of the Feast of the Holy Spirit a review should be held in the great courts of Texcoco. Eighty-four horsemen were present, and six hundred and fifty soldiers with sword and shield and many with lances, and a hundred and ninety-four crossbowmen and musketeers, and from these were chosen crews to man the thirteen launches. Twelve crossbowmen and musketeers were to go on each; but they were not to row, for twelve additional men were picked to man the oars, six on each side. Besides these there was a captain for every launch, so that each carried twenty-five men, which amounts to upwards of three hundred in all. Cortes also distributed among them all the boat-guns and falconets we possessed and the powder he thought they would need. Having done this, he proclaimed the rules which we must observe:

First, no man should dare to blaspheme Our Lord nor his Blessed Mother, nor the apostles, nor any of the saints, under heavy penalties.

Second, that no soldier should ill-treat our allies, who had come to help us, or take anything from them even if it was captured booty; neither men nor women prisoners, gold, silver, nor *chalchihuites*.

Third, that no soldier should dare to leave the camp by day or night to go to any allied town, either to fetch food or for any other reason, under heavy penalties.

Fourth, that all soldiers should wear very good armour, well quilted, and a gorget, headpiece, leggings, and shield.

Fifth, that no one should on any account gamble for a horse or arms, under heavy penalties.

Sixth, that no soldier, horseman, crossbowman, or musketeer should sleep except in complete armour and with his sandals on his feet, except in case of severe wounds or sickness.

Further rules were proclaimed to be observed on campaign: that anyone sleeping on guard or quitting his post should be punished with death, and that no soldier should go from one

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camp to another without his captain's permission, under the same penalty.

After the review Cortes discovered that there were not enough seamen to row the launches. The crews of the ships which we had destroyed and the sailors from Narvaez' ships and those from Jamaica had been put on a list and warned that they would have to row. But including them all, there were still not sufficient men, and some of them refused the task. Cortes then made an inquiry to discover who were sailors or who had been seen to go out fishing, and any men who came from Palos or Moguer or any other port were ordered to man the launches, under severe penalties for refusal. Even if they claimed high birth, he still made them row. Thus he got together a hundred and fifty oarsmen; and they suffered far less hardship than we who fought on the causeways, and got rich plunder into the bargain. Cortes then chose his captains and gave them his orders, telling each what to do, to what part of the causeway he was to go, and with which of our captains there he was to cooperate.

As soon as these orders had been given, a message was brought to Cortes that the Tlascalcan captains were approaching under the supreme command of Xicotenga the Younger, who had two of his brothers with him and was accompanied by another great force under the command of Chichimecatecle, also a company from Huexotzinco and another from Cholula. The Cholulans, however, were few in numbers, because, from what I observed, although they never again sided with the Mexicans after we punished them, they did not side with us either, but watched events.

When Cortes heard that Xicotenga and his brothers and captains were approaching a day before their time, accompanied by Pedro de Alvarado and others, he went out a mile to receive them, and greeted and embraced them all. They marched in fine order, all very brilliant, beneath their great devices, each company separately with its banners streaming, and the white bird, like an eagle with wings outstretched, that is their badge. The ensigns waved their banners and standards, and all carried bows and arrows, two-handed swords, javelins, and spear-throwers. Some also had double-edged swords and long or short

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lances. Marching in good order, in their feathered head-dresses, they whistled, shouted, and cried: 'Long live our lord the Emperor!' and 'Castile! Castile!' and 'Tlascala! Tlascala!' They took more than three hours entering Texcoco.

Cortes ordered that our allies should be given good quarters and provided with everything we had in our camp. Then, after many embraces and promises to make them rich, he took his leave, telling them that he would send his orders next day, but that they should rest now, for they were tired.

Cortes appointed Pedro de Alvarado captain of a hundred and fifty soldiers, thirty horsemen, and eighteen musketeers and crossbowmen. With him he sent his brother, Jorge de Alvarado, Gutierrez de Badajoz, and Andres de Monjaraz, with fifty soldiers each and exactly a third of the musketeers and crossbowmen. Pedro commanded the horsemen himself, and was commander of all three companies, and he was given eight thousand Tlascalans as well. I too was sent with him, and we were told to take up our position in the city of Tacuba.

Cortes then gave Cristobal de Olid, who was quartermaster, thirty horsemen, a hundred and seventy-five soldiers, and twenty crossbowmen and musketeers, and put three captains under him: Andres de Tapia, Francisco Verdugo, and Francisco de Lugo, among whom he divided this force exactly, leaving Cristobal de Olid the horsemen and the supreme command over the three companies. He too was given eight thousand Tlascalans, and he was told to go and establish his camp in the city of Coyoacan, six miles from Tacuba.

Gonzalo de Sandoval, the chief constable, was given another division of twenty-four horsemen, fourteen musketeers and crossbowmen, and a hundred and fifty soldiers, also more than eight thousand Indian warriors from Chalco and Huexotzinco and other friendly places through which he had to pass. As captains he was given his friends Luis Marin and Pedro de Ircio, among whom his force was divided, while he retained command of the horsemen and was set over his two comrades. His orders were to establish his camp near Iztapalapa and attack it, doing all the damage he could until he should receive other instructions. He did not leave Texcoco until Cortes, who him-

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self commanded the launches, was ready to put them on the lake.

As we were to set out next morning, the companies of Tlascalans were now sent ahead as far as the Mexican border, in order to avoid congestion on the road. But they were careless in their order of march, and neither Chichimecatecle nor any of the other captains noticed that Xicotenga, their supreme commander, was not with them. When Chichimecatecle finally inquired what had become of him, it was discovered that he had secretly returned to Tlascala during the night, and was planning to seize the Caciqueship, vassals, and lands of Chichimecatecle for himself. The reasons which the Tlascalans gave for his action were that once the Tlascalans, and especially Chichimecatecle, had gone to the war, he knew there would be no one to oppose him. Xicotenga the Elder, being his father, would help him, Mase Escasi was dead, and the only man he feared was Chichimecatecle. They said they had always known that Xicotenga had no wish to take part in the war against Mexico, for they had heard him say many times that all of us and of them would be killed.

On receiving this news Chichimecatecle, whose lands and vassals were in danger, turned very swiftly back from the march, and returned to Texcoco to inform Cortes, who immediately dispatched five Texcocan chiefs and two from Tlascala, all friends of Xicotenga's, to force him to come back. They were to tell him that Cortes begged him to return and fight his enemies the Mexicans, and to remind him that if his father Don Lorenzo de Vargas were not old and blind he would certainly do so, and that as all the Tlascalans were loyal servants of His Majesty, it was not right that he should dishonour them as he was now doing.

To this Xicotenga answered that if his father and Mase Escasi had taken his advice, Cortes would not have obtained such complete authority over the Tlascalans, and that, to waste no more words, he did not intend to return.

On receiving this answer, Cortes at once ordered a constable, four horsemen, and five chiefs from Texcoco to go with all speed and hang him wherever they caught him. 'There is no

reforming this *Cacique*,' he said. 'He will always be a traitor and a villain and a plotter of evil,' and he added that this was no time to bear with him or to forgive the past. On hearing this Pedro de Alvarado put in a strong plea for Xicotenga; and Cortes answered him favourably, but secretly he ordered the constable and the horsemen to kill him, which they did. They hanged him in a town which was subject to Texcoco, and thus put an end to his treacheries. Some Tlascalans said that Xicotenga's father Don Lorenzo de Vargas had sent a message to Cortes, saying that his son was wicked and he would not vouch for him, and begging Cortes to kill him.

Because of Xicotenga's treachery, we stayed at Texcoco for another day, and departed on the next, which was 13 May, both divisions together, for both had to take the same road and to spend the night at Acolman. So Christobal de Olid sent men ahead to that town to secure quarters, and green branches were hung above the roof of each house to show that it was his. Consequently, when we arrived under Pedro de Alvarado there was nowhere for us to lodge. The men of our company had already half drawn their swords against Cristobal de Olid's men, and even the captains had defied one another. Fortunately there was no lack of gentlemen on both sides to intervene and somewhat appease the clamour, though all of us were still disgruntled. A message was sent to Cortes, and he dispatched Friar Pedro Melgarejo and captain Luis Marin in all haste. He also wrote to the captains and the rest of us, scolding us for our conduct. When the two emissaries arrived we made friends; but from that time onwards the two captains Pedro de Alvarado and Cristobal de Olid remained on bad terms.

Next day the two divisions continued their march, and we spent the night in a large town which we found deserted, for we were now in Mexican territory. We passed the following night in another large town named Cuauhtitlan, and on the day after moved through Tenayuca and Atzacapotzalco, all three of which were also deserted. On the evening of the last day we came to Tacuba and at once took up our quarters in some large houses and halls, for this place too was deserted. Our Tlascalan allies also found quarters there, and on that evening they visited

the farms belonging to these towns, and brought in food to eat. We set a good watch and posted our sentinels carefully for, as I have said, Tacuba is close to Mexico.

When night fell we heard loud shouting from the lake. The Mexicans were abusing us with the taunt that we were not men enough to come out and fight them. They had many canoes full of warriors, and the causeways were crowded with fighting men, and the purpose of their mockery was to provoke us into fighting them that night. But we had gained experience from our battle on the causeways and the bridges, and refused to come out till next day, which was Sunday. Then when Father Juan Diaz had said mass and we had commended ourselves to God, we decided that both divisions should go together to cut off the city's water supply at Chapultepec, which was about a mile and a half from Tacuba.

As we went to break the pipes we found many warriors waiting for us on the road, for they were well aware that this would be the first damage we could inflict on them. When they met us, near some difficult ground, they began to shoot arrows and darts and to hurl stones, so that three of our men were wounded. But we quickly put them to flight, and our Tlascalan allies pursued them so successfully that they killed twenty and took six or eight prisoners. Once these bands were dispersed we broke the pipes which supplied the city, and the water did not flow into Mexico again so long as the war lasted. When we had accomplished this, our captains agreed that we should now reconnoitre, advance along the causeway from Tacuba, and endeavour to seize a bridge. But when we reached the causeway, armed canoes were so thick on the lake and there were so many warriors on the causeway itself, that we were filled with astonishment; and they fired so many darts, arrows, and stones at us that more than thirty of us were wounded at the first encounter. Nevertheless we advanced along the causeway towards the bridge, and they retreated before us in order, as I understand, to trap us on the other side. For once we had crossed, such a host of warriors descended on us that we could not repel them. The causeway was only eight yards wide. So what could we do, against a force that assailed us from both

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sides and shot at us as a sitting target? Our crossbowmen and musketeers fired continuously at their canoes, but hardly did them any damage, for they were very well protected by wooden bulwarks. Then, when we attacked the bands that were fighting on the causeway itself, they immediately jumped into the water; and there were so many of them that we could do nothing against them. Our horsemen were useless, for the Indians wounded their horses from one side or the other, hurling darts from the water, into which, as I have said, they leapt when pursued.

We fought them on the causeway for about an hour, and they pressed us so hard that we could resist no longer. Finally we saw a great fleet of canoes approaching from another direction to cut off our lines of retreat. Seeing this, and realizing that our Tlascalcan allies were greatly obstructing the causeway and that if they jumped off they could not fight in the water, we decided, captains and soldiers alike, to attempt no further advance and to retire in good order.

When we reached dry land, hard pressed by the Mexicans and pursued by their howls, shouts, and whistles, we thanked God for our escape from the fight. For eight of our soldiers had been killed and more than a hundred wounded. Yet, even so, they howled insults at us from the canoes. But our friends the Tlascalans challenged them to come ashore, saying that they would fight them even if they were double their numbers. These were our first moves, to cut off their water supply and reconnoitre the lake, but we did not gain much honour by them.

Next morning Cristobal de Olid said he wished to go to his station at Coyoacan, nearly five miles away, and although Pedro de Alvarado and other gentlemen begged him to keep the two forces together, he insisted on departing. For he was a very brave man, and he said that it had been Pedro de Alvarado's fault that we had done badly on the previous day. So he went to the post that Cortes had assigned to him, and we stayed in camp. But it was wrong to separate the two divisions. If the Mexicans had known how small our numbers were, they would have attacked both companies separately in the four or five days that we were apart, before the arrival of the launches, and

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we should have been hard pressed and have suffered great losses.

As it was, we remained in Tacuba and Cristobal de Olid in his camp, and neither party dared to reconnoitre any further or to advance along the causeways. Every day we had skirmishes, with large bands of Mexicans, who came on land to fight us.

Meanwhile Gonzalo de Sandoval set out from Texcoco four days after the feast of Corpus Christi, and came to Iztapalapa. Almost all his route was through friendly territory which was subject to Texcoco. But when he reached Iztapalapa, he began to fight and to burn many of the houses that stood on dry land. But before many hours had passed great bands of Mexicans came to the aid of that city, and Sandoval had a stiff battle with them. During the fighting they saw great smoke-signals going up from a hill on the lakeside, and answering signals from other towns on the lake. They were summoning all the canoes from Mexico and the towns around the lake, for they saw that Cortes had now set out from Texcoco with the thirteen launches. Once Sandoval had left, Cortes delayed no longer; and the first thing he did on entering the lake was to attack a rocky island near Mexico on which many Mexicans had collected. Every canoe in the whole of the city, and in every town on or near the lake, had come out against him. For this reason the attack on Sandoval somewhat slackened, but as at that time most of the houses stood on the water, Cortes could not do them much harm. At the beginning, however, he killed many of the enemy, and with the help of his large force of allies captured and made prisoner many of the people of these towns.

When Cortes saw so many fleets of canoes converging on his thirteen launches, he was very frightened, and this was not unreasonable, since there were more than a thousand canoes. So he abandoned the fight at the island and stationed himself out in the lake, so that if he found his men hard pressed he could sail out freely and hurry to any place he chose. He ordered the launch captains not to attack or bear down on the canoes until the land-breeze freshened, for it was just beginning to blow. When the canoes saw the launches halting, they thought that it was for fear of them, and the Mexican captains spurred them on, telling all their people to go in at once to attack them. At

that moment a very strong, favourable breeze sprang up. The time was now suitable, and our oarsmen put on a great spurt, and Cortes ordered them to attack. Many of the canoes were overturned and many Indians were killed and captured, and the remaining craft made off to take refuge among the houses on the lake and in other places where our launches could not reach them. This was the first battle on the lake, and Cortes won the victory. Praise be to God for it all! Amen.

After this Cortes brought his launches towards Coyoacan, where Cristobal de Olid had his camp,¹ and fought many bands of Mexicans who were lying in wait for him in difficult places, hoping to capture the launches. As he was fiercely attacked from the canoes on the lake and from some *cues* on the causeway, he ordered four cannon to be taken out of the launches, with which he killed and wounded many Indians. But the gunners were in such a hurry that they carelessly set fire to their powder, and some of them even had their hands and faces scorched. Then Cortes promptly dispatched a very fast launch to Sandoval's camp in Iztapalapa to bring all the powder that was there, and he wrote to Sandoval that he must not move from his position.

All this time I was at Tacuba with Pedro de Alvarado, and I will relate what we did in our camp. Knowing that Cortes was going about the lake, we pushed forward along our causeway, and with greater caution than before pushed ahead as far as the first bridge, the crossbowmen and musketeers working together, some loading while the others fired. Pedro de Alvarado ordered the horsemen not to advance with us, but to stay on dry land and protect our rear, for he feared that the towns through which we had passed might attack us on the causeway. So, sometimes attacking and sometimes on the defensive, we fought every day, losing three soldiers in these engagements, and at the same time we filled in the awkward places on the causeway.

1. Actually, according to his own third letter, Cortes first captured the rocky island, chasing the enemy's canoes back towards Mexico, and then landed on the Iztapalapa causeway, where it was joined by another causeway which came from the direction of Coyoacan. Here he established a camp.

Seeing that he could do no harm to the people of Iztapalapa – for they were in the water – though they could wound his soldiers, Sandoval decided to attack a small town and group of houses that stood in the lake. Having succeeded in effecting an entry, he was able to begin the attack. But while the fighting was going on, Guatemoc sent many warriors to the help of the inhabitants, to destroy and break open the causeway by which Sandoval had advanced; and to surround his troops and leave them no way of escape he sent many warriors to the other side also.

While standing with Cristobal de Olid, Cortes saw the great fleet of canoes making towards Iztapalapa, and decided to go in that direction with his launches and the whole of Olid's company, to look for Sandoval, he on the lake with the launches and Olid with his men along the causeway. As they went forward, they saw a swarm of Mexicans breaking up this causeway, from which they concluded that Sandoval was in a certain group of houses, towards which they rowed the launches. They found him there fighting Guatemoc's warriors; and when the combat slackened a little, Cortes ordered him to abandon his camp at Iztapalapa and go by land to blockade the other causeway, which runs from Mexico to a town once called Tepeaquilla, but now Our Lady of Guadalupe, the place of many miracles.

As Cortes and all our captains and soldiers realized that without the launches we could not advance along the causeways to attack Mexico, he sent four of them to Pedro de Alvarado, and kept six in his own camp, which he now shared with Cristobal de Olid. He sent two more to Gonzalo de Sandoval on the Tepeaquilla causeway, and ordered that the smallest should not be sent on the lake again, since it was now light and the canoes might overturn it. He had the soldiers and oarsmen of its crew distributed among the other twelve launches, for twenty of their complement had already received very severe wounds.

When this reinforcement reached our camp at Tacuba, Pedro de Alvarado ordered two of the launches to move to one side of the causeway and two to the other, and the fighting went very much in our favour. For the launches routed the canoes

which had been attacking us from the water, and so we were able to capture several bridges and barricades. During this fight, however, the enemy discharged upon us so many stones from their slings, so many darts, and so many arrows that although all our soldiers wore armour they were wounded on the head and body, and a bitter battle went on until night parted us. I must explain that from time to time the Mexicans relieved one band by another, a change which we observed by the marks and distinguishing signs on their armour. As for the launches, they were checked by the darts, arrows, and stones that fell on them, thicker than hail, from the high rooftops. I do not know how else to describe it, and no one would understand me who was not there. But they really were more numerous than hailstones, and quickly covered the causeway. Whenever we left some bridge or barricade unguarded, after having captured it with great efforts, they would retake it that night, deepen the channel, strengthen the defences, and even dig holes under the water into which we should stumble and fall when the moment came to retire after the next day's fighting. Then they would be able to overwhelm us from their canoes. For they had posted many of them for this purpose in places where our launches could not find them, so that when we were trapped in the pits they could attack us both by land and water; and to prevent our launches from coming to our aid they had fixed many concealed stakes in the water on which they would get impaled.

We fought in this way every day, and, as I have already said, our horsemen were of little use on the causeways. For if they charged or pursued the enemy's bands, the Mexicans immediately jumped into the water. Other bands too were posted behind breastworks which the enemy raised on the causeways; and these were armed with long lances and even longer scythes, made from the arms they had captured when they defeated us so severely in Mexico. With these lances, and great showers of darts and arrows shot from the lake, they wounded and killed the horses before the riders could do the opposing squadrons any harm. Moreover, those horsemen who owned their mounts were unwilling to risk them, for at that time horses cost eight hundred or even a thousand and more pesos, and more were not

to be had. But in any case they could have caught very few of the enemy on the causeway.

Now when we fell back at nightfall, we cauterized our wounds with burning oil, and a soldier called Juan Catalan made a cross and said a prayer over them. We certainly found that our Lord Jesus Christ gave us strength, as well as showing us mercies every day, for they healed very quickly.

Wounded and bandaged with rags, we had to fight from morning till night, for if the wounded had not fought but stayed behind in camp, there would not have been twenty sound men in each company to go out.

When our Tlascalcan allies saw the soldier Catalan curing us by making the sign of the cross over our wounds and broken heads, they went to him too; and there were so many of them that he could hardly attend to them in a day.

As for our captains and our standard-bearer and his guard, they were covered with wounds and their standards were ragged. Indeed I should say that we needed a new standard-bearer every day, for we were so badly battered that no one could carry the standards into battle a second time.

What is more, we had hardly enough to eat. I do not speak of maize-cakes, for we had plenty of them, but of nourishing food for the wounded. The wretched stuff on which we existed was a vegetable that the Indians eat called *quelites*, supplemented by the local cherries, while they lasted, and afterwards by prickly pears, which then came into season.

Events in Cortes' camp and in Sandoval's were much the same as in ours. Not a day passed without great companies of Mexicans coming to attack them and, as I have said, their attacks lasted from dawn till nightfall. For this purpose Guatemoc had chosen captains and squadrons to reinforce each causeway, and he warned Tlatelolco and all the lakeside towns which I have so often mentioned that when a signal was raised on the great *cue* of Tlatelolco, their men must come up, some in canoes and some by land. The Mexican captains had received well concerted orders, too, on how and when and to what points they must bring assistance.

Now I will explain the way in which we changed our order

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and method of fighting. It was like this. When we saw that however many water obstacles we captured each day, the Mexicans returned and opened them again, and that in our assault a few were killed and most of us wounded, we decided to take up our station on the causeway, in a small square where there were some temple towers which we had already captured. Here there was room for us to set up our shelters, which were so poor that when it rained we all got wet. Indeed they were fit for nothing but to protect us from the dew. The Indian women who made our bread we left in Tacuba, with all the horsemen and our Tlascalan allies to guard them, and also to watch the passes, in case the enemy should come down from the near-by towns and attack our rearguard while we were fighting on the causeway.

Once we had set up our shelters in this square, we endeavoured to destroy any houses or groups of buildings we captured and to fill up any water obstacles. We pulled the houses down to the ground, for if we set fire to them they took too long to burn, and one did not catch alight from another, because, as I have several times said, they all stood in the water, and the only way of passing from one to another was over bridges or by canoe; and if we tried to swim across, the enemy did great execution on us from the flat roofs. We were safer, therefore, when the houses were demolished.

Once we had captured a barrier or bridge or strong-point at which they had put up great resistance, we tried to guard it by day and night. Our watches were organized in this way: All our companies were on guard together. The first, of just over forty soldiers, was on duty from sunset until midnight, and another company of forty men took over from midnight until two hours before dawn. However, the first company did not leave their post, but slept there on the ground. This second period is called the 'sleeping-watch'; and when it was over another company came to the dawn-watch, which lasted for the two hours until day. But those who had done the 'sleeping-watch' did not leave the spot either. When morning came, therefore, there were a hundred and twenty soldiers all on guard together. On some nights, even, when we thought there

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was great danger, we all watched from dawn till daybreak, for fear that a heavy attack by the enemy might break our defences. For we had been warned by some Mexican captains whom we had taken in battle that Guatemoc had made a plan, which he had discussed with his officers, for breaking through our line on the causeway, either by day or night. Then when he had overwhelmed us in our sector, he would quickly defeat and rout Cortes and Sandoval on the other two causeways. He had also arranged that the nine lakeside towns, Tacuba itself, Atzapotzalco, and Tenayuca, should unite and, on a chosen day, attack us from the rear, breaking our position on the causeway. Also, one night, they were to seize the Indian women who made our bread in Tacuba, and capture our baggage. On learning this, we warned our horsemen in Tacuba and our Tlascalan allies to keep watch all night and remain on the alert.

Guatemoc carried out this plan as he had made it. On several occasions great bands came at midnight to attack us and break through, and were followed by others in the 'sleeping-watch' and the dawn-watch. Sometimes they came noiselessly and sometimes with loud yells and whistles, and when they reached the place where we were keeping watch some let fly darts and stones and arrows, while others came on with lances. But although we sustained some wounds, we held our position and sent many of them back wounded. The large bands of warriors who came to seize our baggage were defeated by our horsemen and the Tlascalans; and as it was night they did not make much of a stand.

Despite rain, wind, and cold, we kept watch in the way I have described; and although wounded we were forced to stay there in the midst of the quagmires. We had only a miserable supply of maize-cakes, vegetables, and prickly pears to eat, and in addition there were the hardships of the fighting, which the officers said were unavoidable.

Then, in spite of all our precautions, the enemy would break some bridge or causeway that we had captured but could not defend in the night. Next day, however, we would recapture it and build it up again. Then the Mexicans would return, break

it once more, and strengthen their position with barricades. This went on until the enemy changed their method of fighting, as I will tell in due course.

Let us leave these daily battles, and those others fought by Cortes and Sandoval, and say what an advantage we had gained by preventing food and water getting to the enemy along the three causeways. But since our launches were stationed at our camps, they were only useful to protect our rear from warriors in canoes and others who attacked from the roof-tops during the fighting. The Mexicans, however, were able to bring in much food and water from the nine towns around the lake, which sent them supplies in canoes by night; and from other friendly villages they received maize, poultry, and all they required. To interrupt these supplies, it was agreed between our three camps that two launches should patrol the lake by night and destroy all the canoes they could or, if they could capture any, should bring them to the camps. Although we missed these two launches as a guard and reinforcement during the night fighting, the plan was a good one. For even if many loaded canoes managed to get through, our launches served a useful purpose in interrupting the Mexicans' supplies of food and water. Moreover the enemy took no precautions when bringing supplies in their canoes, and so no day passed in which the patrolling launches did not bring in some prizes, with many Indians hanging from their yards.

Let us leave this and tell of the strategem which the Mexicans employed to capture our launches and kill their crews. It was like this. As I have said, every night and in the early mornings, our men went out on the lake searching for canoes, and overturned them from their launches, capturing many of them. The Mexicans decided to arm thirty pirogues, and at night they posted all thirty, covered over with branches, among some reed-beds, in a place where the launches could not see them. Then before nightfall they sent out two or three canoes with strong oarsmen, which appeared to be carrying provisions or water. On the course that the Mexicans thought the launches would follow in attacking these canoes, they had driven a number of stout timbers pointed like stakes, on which they would get

impaled. So, as the canoes crossed the lake and approached the reed-beds, showing every sign of fear, two of our launches set out in pursuit. The two canoes made a show of retiring to the land at the place where the thirty pirogues were lying in wait; and the launches followed them. But when they reached the ambush all the pirogues came out together and attacked them, quickly wounding all the soldiers, oarsmen, and officers; and the launches could not escape in either direction on account of the stakes that had been planted. Thus they killed a certain Captain de Portilla, an excellent soldier who had fought in Italy, and wounded Pedro Barba, another very good officer, whose launch they captured and who died of his wounds three days later. These two launches belonged to Cortes' camp, and their loss distressed him greatly. But within a few days the enemy planted other very successful ambushes, which I will describe in due course.

I will now go on to speak of the severe fighting that was all the time going on in Cortes' camp and in Gonzalo de Sandoval's. But by far the heavier engagements were fought by Cortes. For he had ordered that all houses should be pulled down and burnt and the bridged channels filled up; and what he gained each day was thus consolidated. He sent an order to Pedro de Alvarado to be sure that we never crossed a bridge or gap in the causeway without first blocking it up, and to pull down and burn every house. Then we had to fill up the gaps and bridges with the mud-bricks and timber of the demolished houses; and our Tlascalan allies helped us manfully in all this warfare.

Now when the Mexicans saw us levelling the houses and filling up the bridges and gaps, they decided on another way of fighting. They would lift a bridge, leaving a very deep and wide channel for us to wade across, which in places was out of our depth. For under the water they dug many pits, which we could not see, and they erected walls and barricades on both sides of the gap. They also drove in many stakes or heavy pointed timber in places where our launches would run on them, if they came to our assistance while we were fighting to capture this fortification. For they well understood that we must first destroy the barricade, and then cross that channel of water, before we

could approach the city. At the same time they kept ready in hidden places many canoes, fully manned with warriors and strong oarsmen. Indeed, one Sunday morning squadrons of warriors fell on us from three directions, attacking us so hard that it was all we could do to prevent them from overwhelming us.

At this time Pedro de Alvarado gave orders that half the horsemen who had remained in Tacuba should sleep on the causeway, where they would be in less danger than before, since no roofs were standing, nearly all the houses having been demolished. In fact, they could now ride down some parts of the causeway without their horses being wounded from the roofs or the canoes.

To continue my story, these three bands came on very boldly, one from the direction of the broad open channel, another from some houses that we had demolished, and the third to attack us in the rear from the direction of Tacuba. Thus we were more or less surrounded. The horsemen with our Tlascalcan allies, however, broke through the band that had taken us from the rear and we resisted the other two so valiantly that we drove them to retreat. But their retreat proved to be a feint. We thought we had captured the first of their barricades, while in fact they had abandoned it. Imagining we had gained a victory, we leapt through the water, and where we crossed there were no pits. We pressed on with our advance among some large houses and temple towers, and the enemy still made a show of retreating. But they went on shooting darts, and stones from their slings, and plenty of arrows; and when we least expected it, a host of warriors sprang on us from a place we could not see, many more joined in from the roofs and houses, and those who had appeared to be retreating suddenly turned round to attack us so hard that we could not hold our ground. We then decided to retire very cautiously. But in the channel we had captured at our first crossing, which had been free from pits, the enemy had stationed such a fleet of canoes that we could not cross at this place. They forced us to cross at another where, as I have said, the water was very deep and they had dug many pits. Being pursued in our retreat by such

a host of warriors, we swam or leapt through the water, and nearly all our men fell into these pits. Then the canoes attacked us, and the Mexicans seized five of our comrades, whom they took to Guatemoc alive. Nearly all of us were wounded. For the launches we were expecting could not come to our aid, being impaled on the stakes that the enemy had fixed there. At the same time they too were overwhelmed by such a rain of darts and arrows that two soldiers were killed at the oars, and many others wounded. To return to the pits in the channel, I think it was a wonder we were not all killed there. For myself, I was seized by a great number of Indians, but I managed to free my sword-arm and the Lord Jesus Christ gave me strength to deal them a few good thrusts, with which I saved myself, though I had a severe wound in the other arm. Once safely out of the water, I lost all sensation and could not stand on my feet or take breath, so exhausted was I by my efforts to free myself from that rabble, and by copious loss of blood. I declare that when they had me in their claws I was mentally commending myself to our Lord God and Our Lady, His blessed Mother; and He it was that gave me strength to save myself. Thanks be to God for the mercy He granted me.

There is another thing I wish to mention. When Pedro de Alvarado and his horsemen had thoroughly routed the bands that had attacked us in the rear from the direction of Tacuba, only a single horseman passed the water and the barricades, a man who had recently come from Spain; and both he and his horse were killed. The cavalry were already advancing to our assistance when they saw us retiring. If they had crossed we should have been compelled to turn back against the Indians, and if they had then been forced to retreat, none of them or their horses or any of us would have survived. For the enemy's dispositions were so cunning that they would have fallen in the pits, and there were a great number of warriors who would have killed their horses with lances, which they had brought for the purpose, and by attacking from the many flat roofs all around, for this was in the heart of the city.

Flushed with their victory, the Mexicans continued throughout that day, which, as I have said, was a Sunday, to send such

vast hoards of warriors against our camp that we could not drive them off. They certainly expected to rout us. But with the aid of some bronze cannon and by dint of hard fighting and by all the companies keeping guard every night, we managed to hold our own.

When Cortes received news of this state of affairs he was very much annoyed. He immediately sent a launch to Pedro de Alvarado with written orders that he was never on any account to leave a gap unblocked, and that all the horsemen were to sleep on the causeway with their horses saddled and bridled all night long. He insisted that we should not attempt to advance a single step until we had filled up that great opening with bricks and timber, and that every precaution should be taken in the camp.¹ When we saw that the great disaster we had suffered was our own fault we then and there began to fill in the opening. Though it cost us great labour and many wounds which the enemy inflicted on us while we were at work, and although six of our soldiers were killed, we had it blocked in four days.

Each night we kept watch on the place itself, all three companies together in accordance with Cortes' orders; and the Mexicans were very close to us as we watched. For they too had their sentinels, and changed them by watches just as we did. They lighted great fires that burnt all night, but their sentinels stood away from them so that we could not distinguish them from a distance. Although we could not see the Indians who were watching, because of the brightness of their fires, yet we always knew when they changed guard, for then they came to feed the fire. As this was a season of heavy rains, on many nights their fire was put out. But they always lit it again, noiselessly and without exchanging a word, for they communicated by whistling.

Very often when we knew they were about to change their guard our musketeers and crossbowmen fired random shots at them. But they did them no harm, for the Mexicans were in a

1. Cortes himself says in his third letter that he visited Pedro de Alvarado's camp and was astonished to find how much he had done, and how far he had penetrated into the city.

position where we should not have been able to attack them at night even if we had wished to do so, on account of another wide and deep channel which they had excavated, and of the barricades and ramparts they had raised. But they shot plenty of missiles at us.

Let us turn from the subject of these sentinels to that of our daily battle on the causeway. Fighting in regular order, we captured the opening I have mentioned where the enemy kept guard. But so many warriors attacked us every day, and so many missiles fell on us, that even though we exercised great caution and wore good armour we were all wounded. Then when we had fought all day and it was growing late, and there was no possibility of a further advance, but only of retreat, the enemy would throw in many companies that they had been keeping for this moment. For they believed that if they attacked very vigorously as we retired, they would be able to rout us. So they came on as bravely as tigers and fought us hand to hand. When we got to know this plan of theirs we made the following dispositions for our retreat. The first thing we did was to get our Tlascalan allies off the causeway. They were very numerous, and the Mexicans, being cunning, would have liked nothing better than to see us obstructed by our friends. Thus they made fierce attacks on us from two or three directions, hoping to catch us between them and cut some of us off. So if we had been impeded by the Tlascalans we should not have been able to fight them everywhere. Once our allies were no longer hampering us, we retired to our camp without ever turning our backs but always facing the enemy. Some of the crossbowmen and musketeers shot while others loaded, and our four launches in the lake, two on either side of the causeway, protected us from the great fleets of canoes and the many stones which were piled on the rooftops and in the houses ready to be hurled down. Yet despite all our caution every one of us was in great hazard of his life until we got back to our shelters. There we cauterized our wounds with oil and banded them with native cloth. We dined off maize-cakes brought to us from Tacuba, and such of us as had them ate vegetables and prickly pears. After this we at once mounted guard at the

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water-channel I have mentioned, and returned to the fight next day. We had no alternative, for the enemy battalions began to attack us early in the morning, shouting their abuse, and even got as far as our camp. Such was the nature of our ordeal.

But let us leave our camp, which was Pedro de Alvarado's, and return to Cortes. The enemy attacked his quarters too, by night and day, killing and wounding many soldiers. He kept two launches employed all night chasing the canoes that brought food and water into Mexico, and one of them captured two chieftains from one of these provisioning canoes, from whom Cortes learnt that forty pirogues and other canoes were once again lying in ambush to capture one of our launches. Cortes flattered these two prisoners, presenting them with cloaks and promising that he would give them land after we had captured Mexico. Then he asked them through our interpreters where the pirogues were, for they would not be in the same place as before. They pointed out the place where they were stationed, and also warned us that many heavy timber stakes had been driven in at certain points, to impale our launches should they turn in flight from their pirogues, so that they could seize and kill the crews.

On receiving this warning, Cortes got six launches ready to go that night, covered with plenty of foliage, to take up their position in some reed-beds about three-quarters of a mile from where the pirogues were hidden. They were rowed with muffled oars, and their crew kept watch all night. Then, early next morning, Cortes ordered a launch to be sent out as if in pursuit of provisioning canoes, with the two Indian chiefs on board to point out the exact position of the pirogues. At the same time the Mexicans sent out their two decoy canoes, which purported to carry supplies, and they went in the direction of the ambush in the hope that our launch would pursue them. Each party had its own idea, and the ideas were in fact the same. When the launch sent out by the cunning Cortes saw the canoes which the Indians used as bait, it began to pursue them, and the two canoes pretended to run for the land, where their pirogues were lying in ambush. Our launch then put up a show of not daring to approach the shore and being about to retire.

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When the pirogues and the other canoes saw it turning away, they all came out after it most furiously, rowing as hard as they could in pursuit. The launch then made off, as if in flight, towards the place where the other six launches were concealed, and the pirogues continued to follow. At that moment a gun was fired as a signal for our launches to emerge. They came out with a great rush, and attacked the enemy craft, which they overturned, killing many warriors and taking many prisoners. The launch which we had sent out as a decoy was now some way off, but it returned to assist the others. A good capture of prisoners and canoes was made, and after that the Mexicans did not dare to lay any more ambushes, or to bring in food and water as openly as before.

Now when the lakeside towns saw that we were victorious every day both land and water, and that, while the people of other towns had made friends with us, we continued to make war on them, doing them great harm and making many prisoners, they came together, as it seems, and decided to ask Cortes for peace. With great humility they asked for pardon if they had in any way offended us, and pleaded that they had been acting under orders and could not have done otherwise. Cortes was delighted by these overtures, and when the news spread to Pedro de Alvarado's and Sandoval's camp, we soldiers were equally pleased. With a smile on his face, and comforting words, Cortes granted them pardon, but said that they deserved severe punishment for helping the Mexicans. The towns that made peace were Iztapalapa, Churubusco, Culucan, Mixquic, and all those on the fresh-water lake. Cortes told them that we should not shift our camp till the Mexicans either sued for peace or were destroyed in the fighting, and ordered them to aid us in our war with all the canoes they possessed, to come to build shelters for him, and to bring him food. They promised to obey and built him some shelters, but brought no food or very little, and that grudgingly. Our shelters were never built, so we of Pedro de Alvarado's company continued to get wet. For, as everyone who has been in this country knows, in June, July, and August it rains every day here.

But to return to the causeway and our daily battles with the

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Mexicans, we succeeded in capturing many temple-towers and houses, and in mastering more openings and channels and bridges between houses, all of which we blocked with the bricks and timbers of the houses that had been pulled down. We kept guard on these channels, but despite all our precautions the enemy came back and deepened and widened them, and erected more barricades. Our three companies considered it disgraceful that some of us should be filling up crossings and gaps and bridges while others were meeting the Mexicans face to face. So, to avoid quarrels over who should be fighting and who should be filling in channels, Pedro de Alvarado ordered us to take turns, one company labouring and guarding the work one day and another the next, until all three companies had had their turn. By this arrangement every building we captured was razed to the ground, and our Tlascalcan allies helped us. So we went on penetrating into the city. But when the time came for retreat, all three companies had to fight together, because that was when we were in the greatest danger.

But let us leave our camp for those of Cortes and Sandoval, which were continuously attacked by day and night, both overland and by fleets of canoes on the lake. They could never shake the enemy off. Cortes' men endeavoured to capture a bridge over a deep opening, which was very difficult to take. The Mexicans had erected many barricades and ramparts, so that it was impossible to cross except by swimming. Whenever an attempt was made hosts of warriors were waiting for our men with arrows and slings and their various kinds of swords and lances, and the lake was full of war-canoes. Near the barricades were many flat roofs from which volleys of stones descended, and here again the launches could be of no assistance because of the stakes they had placed there. In capturing this fortress, bridge, and opening, Cortes' troops suffered great losses. Four of his soldiers were killed in the fighting and more than thirty were wounded; and as it was already late when they effected the capture, they had no time to block the channel. They made their retreat with much difficulty and in great danger, carrying their own wounded and many more Tlascalans who had been hurt.

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Let us now speak of another way in which Guatemoc ordered his companies to fight, and for which he had his whole force prepared. It was on the following day, the feast of Saint John, and exactly one year since we had first entered Mexico to relieve Pedro de Alvarado and had been so severely defeated. It appears that the Mexicans had kept count of this, for Guatemoc ordered that we should be attacked at all three camps by his whole army and with the greatest possible vigour, both on land and by water. The attack was timed for the 'sleeping-watch', and in order that the launches should not be able to help us, stakes had been placed in most parts of the lake to impale them. The enemy came along at such a furious pace that had it not been for those who were on watch – more than a hundred and twenty very experienced soldiers – they would have broken into our camp. As it was we were in very great danger. However, by fighting in good order we withstood them. But fifteen of our men were wounded, two of whom died of their wounds within a week.

In Cortes' camp the situation was very difficult also. Our troops were reduced to the greatest straits, and many were killed and wounded; and the same thing happened in Sandoval's camp. They attacked us like this on two successive nights, and many Mexicans were killed and very many wounded in these encounters. Realizing, however, that these two nights of fighting had gained them nothing, Guatemoc, his captains, and *papas* decided to come with all their combined forces at the down-watch and attack our camp in Tacuba. Advancing fearlessly, they invested us on two sides, and had almost defeated and cut us off when, thanks be to Jesus Christ, we mustered the strength to turn and close our ranks. Under the partial protection of the launches we advanced shoulder to shoulder, cutting and thrusting as we went, and drove them back a little. Our horsemen were not idle, and our crossbowmen and musketeers did what they could, but they had enough work in breaking up yet other forces which attacked us from the rear. In that battle eight of our men were killed and many more wounded, including Pedro de Alvarado, who was hit on the head. If our Tlascalcan allies had slept on the causeway that

night, we should have been seriously hampered by their numbers and in great danger; but thanks to our past experience we had no concern on that score, since we had got them away quickly and they were back in Tacuba.

Seeing that it was impossible to fill in every channel and gap that we captured in the daytime and that the Mexicans reopened and refortified each night, and that all of us together fighting, filling in, and keeping watch was very hard labour, Cortes decided to hold consultations with the captains and soldiers in his camp, and wrote to us in Alvarado's camp, and to those in Sandoval's, to learn the opinion of us all. What he asked us was whether we approved of a rapid advance into the city as far as Tlatelolco, which is the great market of Mexico and much larger and broader than that at Salamanca. If we could capture it, he thought it would be good to pitch all three camps there, since from that base we should be able to fight in the streets of Mexico without all the labour of our nightly retreats and of filling in and guarding the bridges.

As is usual in such discussions, there were many different opinions. Some of us said that it was not a good idea to take up our position so far inside the city, but that we should go on as we were, fighting and pulling down and burning the houses. The strongest argument put forward by those of us who held this opinion was that if we took up our position in Tlatelolco and left the causeways and bridges unfortified and unguarded, the Mexicans, being so strong in warriors and canoes, would break them down again and we should lose our mastery of them. They would then attack us with their powerful forces by night and day, and as they always had plenty of stakes in position, our launches would not be able to help us. By the plan Cortes was proposing, it would thus be we who were besieged, and the enemy would be left in possession of the shore, the countryside, and the lake. We wrote him our opinion of his plan so that we should not fall into the same devilish trouble as when we were escaping from Mexico.

Cortes listened to our opinions and the reasons with which we supported them. But the sole outcome of all this discussion was that next day we were to advance with all possible strength

from all three camps, horsemen, crossbowmen, musketeers, and soldiers, and push forward into the great market square of Tlatelolco. When all was ready in the three camps, and warnings had been sent to our Tlascalan allies, the men of Texcoco, and those of the other towns who had recently sworn obedience to His Majesty and were to bring their canoes to help our launches, we started from our camp on Sunday morning, after mass. Cortes too set out from his camp, and Sandoval led his men forward; and each company advanced in full force, capturing barricades and bridges. The Mexicans fought like brave men, but Cortes made great gains, and so did Gonzalo de Sandoval. As for us, we had already captured another barricade and bridge, which was very difficult because Guatemoc had great forces guarding them. Many of our men were wounded, one so severely that he died a little later, and more than a thousand of our Tlascalan allies were injured. Still, we followed up our victory in high spirits.

To return to Cortes and his men, they captured a deepish water-opening with a very narrow causeway across it, which the Mexicans had constructed most cunningly. For they had cleverly foreseen just what would happen; which was that after his victory Cortes and his men would press along the causeway, which would be crowded with our allies. They decided therefore that at this point they must pretend to be in flight, but continue to hurl javelins, arrows, and stones and to make little stands as though trying to put up some resistance, until they lured Cortes on to follow them.

When the Mexicans saw that Cortes was indeed following up his victory in this way, they simulated flight, as they had planned. Then, as bad fortune follows on good and great disasters succeed great prosperity, so in his headlong pursuit of the enemy, either out of carelessness or because Our Lord permitted it, Cortes and his men omitted to fill in the channel they had captured. The causeway had been deliberately built very narrow, and it was interrupted by water in some places, and full of mud and mire. When the Mexicans saw him cross that channel without filling it in they were highly delighted. They had assembled great bands of warriors under very valiant captains

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and posted many canoes on the lake in places where our launches could not reach them on account of great stakes. All was prepared for the moment when such a furious army of shrieking, shouting, and whistling Mexicans fell on Cortes and his men that they could not stand up to the shock of their charge. Our soldiers, captains, and standard-bearers then decided to retreat in good order. But the enemy continued to charge them furiously, and drove them back to that difficult crossing. Meanwhile our allies, of whom Cortes had brought great numbers, were so confused that they turned and fled, offering no resistance. On seeing them run away in disorder Cortes tried to hearten them with cries of: 'Stop, stop, gentlemen! Stand firm! What do you mean by turning your backs?' But he could not halt them.

Then, at that gap in the causeway which they had neglected to fill, on that little, narrow, broken causeway, the Mexicans, aided by their canoes, defeated Cortes, wounding him in the leg, taking sixty-six of his soldiers alive, and killing eight horses. Six or seven Mexican captains had already seized our Captain, but the Lord was pleased to help him and give him strength to defend himself, although wounded. Then, in the nick of time, that very valiant soldier Cristobal de Olea came up to him and, seeing Cortes held by so many Indians, promptly killed four of them with mighty thrusts of his sword; and another brave soldier called Lerma helped him. Such was the personal bravery of these two men that the Indian captains let Cortes go. But in defending him for the second time Olea lost his life and Lerma was almost killed. Then many other soldiers rushed up and, although badly wounded, grasped Cortes and pulled him out of his dangerous position in the mud. The quartermaster Cristobal de Olid also ran forward, and they seized Cortes by the arms to drag him out of the mud and water, and brought him a horse, on which he escaped from death. At that same moment his steward Cristobal de Guzman arrived with another horse. Meanwhile the Mexican warriors went on fighting very bravely and successfully from the rooftops, inflicting great damage on us and capturing Cristobal de Guzman, whom they carried alive to Guatemoc; and they continued to pursue Cortes and his men

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until they had driven them back to camp. Even after that disaster, when they reached their quarters the Mexicans continued to harry them, shouting and yelling abuse and calling them cowards.

But to turn from Cortes and his defeat to our army under Pedro de Alvarado, on the causeway from Tacuba. We were advancing most victoriously when suddenly and unexpectedly we saw a great number of Mexican bands advancing against us, with handsome standards and plumes. Uttering loud yells, they threw in front of us five heads, streaming with blood, which they had just cut off the men of Cortes' company whom they had captured.

'We will kill you too,' they cried, 'as we have killed Malinche and Sandoval, and all the men they brought with them.' With these words they closed in on us, and neither cut nor thrust, nor crossbow nor musket could keep them off. They rushed at us as if we were a target. Even so, we did not break our ranks at all as we retired. We at once commanded our Tlascalcan allies to get quickly out of our way in the streets and on the causeways and at the difficult places, and this time they did so with a will. When they saw those five bloodstained heads, they said that Malinche and Sandoval and all the *Teules* with them had been killed, and that the same would happen to us, and to them, the Tlascalans. They were very much frightened, for they believed what they said.

As we were retreating, we heard the sound of trumpets from the great *cue* of Huichilobos and Tezcatlipoca, which dominates the whole city, and the beating of a drum, a very sad sound as of some devilish instrument, which could be heard six miles away; and with it came the noise of many kettle-drums, conches, horns, and whistles. At that moment, as we afterwards learnt, they were offering the hearts and blood of ten of our comrades to these two idols.

But let us return to our retreat and the great attack they made on us from the causeway, the rooftops, and the canoes on the lake. At that moment we were attacked once more by fresh bands whom Guatemoc had just sent, and he had ordered his horn to be sounded. The blowing of this horn was a signal

that his captains and warriors must now fight to capture their enemies or die in the attempt, and as soon as this sound struck their ears, his bands and companies, hurling themselves on us with a terrifying and indescribable fury, endeavoured to drag us away. Even now, when I stop to think, I seem to see it all and to be present at that battle once more. It was our Lord Jesus Christ, let me repeat, who gave us strength, for we were all wounded. It was He who saved us, for otherwise we should never have reached our huts, and I praise and thank Him for it, that I escaped that time, as on other occasions, from the power of the Mexicans.

The horsemen charged repeatedly, and with two cannon which we placed near our huts, and which were loaded and fired by turns, we managed to hold our own. The causeway was choked with Mexicans, who pursued us as far as the houses, as if we were already conquered, and hurled javelins and stones at us. But, as I have said, we killed many of them with these cannon. The most useful man that day was a gentleman called Pedro Moreno Medrano, who now lives at Puebla. He acted as gunner, because our proper artillerymen had been either killed or wounded. He was a good soldier, and gave us great assistance. While we were defending ourselves like this, hard pressed and wounded, we did not know whether Cortes and Sandoval and their armies had been killed or routed, as the Mexicans had told us when they threw down those heads, which they had brought tied together by the hair and beards. We could get no news of them, for they were fighting about a mile and a half away, and the place where the Mexicans had defeated Cortes was even further off. We were very distressed, therefore, but by keeping together in one body, both wounded and sound, we withstood the fury of the attack, which the Mexicans believed would annihilate us. For they had already captured one of our launches, killing three soldiers and wounding the captain and the rest of the crew, though it had afterwards been rescued by another launch whose captain was Juan Jaramillo; and yet another was impaled in a place from which it could not move. Its captain was Juan de Limpias, who lost his hearing at that time, and now lives at Puebla. He himself

fought so valiantly, and so encouraged the soldiers who were rowing the launch, that they broke the stakes and got away, all badly wounded, thus saving the craft, which was the first to break the stakes, a great thing for us all.

To return to Cortes, when he and nearly all his men were either killed or wounded, the Mexican bands made an attack on his camp, and cast in front of the soldiers who were defending it another four heads, dripping with blood, which were those of four men captured from Cortes' own army. But they said they were the heads of Tonatio – that is of Pedro de Alvarado – and of Sandoval, Bernal Díaz, and another *Teule*, and that they had already killed us all at Tacuba. It is said that Cortes was even more distressed than before, and that tears sprang to his eyes and the eyes of all those who were with him. Nevertheless he did not seem to weaken. He at once ordered Cristobal de Olid, the quartermaster, and his captains to be sure that the many Mexicans who were pressing in on them did not break into the camp, and to see that his men held together, the sound and the wounded alike. He then sent Andres de Tapia with three horsemen post-haste overland to Tacuba, to see if we were alive, and to tell us, if we had not been defeated, to keep watch by day and night, also in a single body. But we had already been doing this for some time. Tapia and his three horsemen came as hard as they could, though he and two of them were wounded, and when they reached our camp and found us fighting the Mexicans who were gathered against us, they rejoiced in their hearts. They told us how Cortes had been defeated and conveyed his message to us, but they did not care to tell us how many had been killed. They gave the number as about twenty-five, and said that the rest were well.

Sandoval and his men had advanced victoriously along the streets in the quarter they were invading. But after the defeat of Cortes, the Mexicans turned on them in such force that they could make no headway. Six soldiers were killed and all the rest injured, including Sandoval himself, who received three wounds, in the thigh, the head, and the left arm; and when the struggle was at its height, the enemy displayed six heads of Cortes' men whom they had killed, saying that these were the heads of

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Malinche, Tonatio, and other captains, and that Sandoval and his companions would meet with the same fate. They then made a fierce attack. When he saw the heads Sandoval told his men to show a bold spirit and not be dismayed. He warned them too that there must be no confusion on the narrow causeway as they retreated, and ordered his allies, who were numerous, to leave it immediately, since they would hamper him. Then, with the help of his two launches and his musketeers and cross-bowmen, he very laboriously retired to his quarters, with all his men badly wounded and discouraged, and six of them dead. Once he was clear of the causeway, although still surrounded by Mexicans, he encouraged his people and their captains, charging them to be sure to keep together by day and night and thus prevent the camp from being overwhelmed.

On receiving captain Luis Marin's assurance that this would be done, wounded and bandaged with rags though he was, Sandoval took two horsemen and rode post-haste to Cortes' camp; and when he saw Cortes, he exclaimed: 'Oh, my lord Captain, what is this? Are these the counsels and stratagems of war that you have always impressed on us? How did this disaster happen?' And Cortes answered him, with the tears starting to his eyes: 'Sandoval, my son, my sins are the cause of this. But I do not deserve as much blame as my captains and soldiers say. It is Julian de Alderete, the treasurer, who was at fault. I told him to fill in that opening where they defeated us. But because he has no experience of war, and is not used to receiving orders from captains, he did not do so.' Then the treasurer himself answered – for he was standing beside Cortes, having come to see Sandoval and find out if his army was dead or defeated – that Cortes was to blame and not he, since during his victorious advance Cortes had been so eager to follow up his advantage that he had cried: 'Forward, gentlemen!' and had never ordered them to fill in the dangerous gap at the bridge. If Cortes had given him that order, said the treasurer, he and his company and the allies would have carried it out. Alderete also blamed our Captain for not ordering the hosts of allies to clear off the causeway in good time, and there was some further angry argument between the two which I will not record. Just at that

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moment the two launches which Cortes kept under his command beside the causeway came in. There had been no news of them since the defeat. It appears that they had been caught on some stakes and, according to their captains' reports, surrounded by canoes which had attacked them. They all came in wounded, and said that in the first place God had aided them with a wind, and then by making every effort with their oars they had broken the stakes and escaped. Cortes was very pleased, for up to that time (although he had not said so in order not to dishearten the soldiers) he had given these launches up for lost, having heard nothing of them.

After this, Cortes strongly urged Sandoval to ride post-haste to our camp at Tacuba and see whether we were defeated, or how we stood; and if he found us alive, he was to help us to defend our camp from their assaults, and he instructed Francisco de Lugo to accompany him, for he knew very well that there were Mexican companies on the road. Indeed he told Lugo that he had already sent Andres de Tapia with three horsemen to get news of us, and feared they might have been killed on the way. Then, after taking his leave of him, he turned to embrace Sandoval, to whom he said: 'See, my son, I cannot go everywhere, because I am wounded. So I entrust you with the task of ensuring the safety of all three camps. I know that Pedro de Alvarado and all his comrades have fought valiantly, like true gentlemen. But I fear the great forces of these dogs may have overwhelmed them. As for me and my army, you can see our condition.'

Sandoval and Francisco de Lugo rode post-haste to our position, arriving a little after dusk, and found us fighting with the Mexicans who were trying to get into our camp by way of some houses we had pulled down. Others were attacking along the causeway, and many canoes were assaulting us from the lake. They had already driven one launch aground, killing two of its crew and wounding all the rest; and Sandoval saw me with six other soldiers above our waists in the lake, helping to push it off into deep water. Many Indians were attacking us, with swords captured when Cortes was defeated or with flint-edged broadswords, trying to prevent us from rescuing the launch, which,

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to judge by their efforts, they intended to drag off with their canoes. Indeed, they had already attached several ropes to it in order to tow it into the city. When Sandoval saw us in this condition, he cried: 'Brothers, put your backs into it and see that they do not get the launch!' And we made such an effort that we dragged it to safety, even though, as I have said, two of its crew were killed and all the rest wounded.

Just then many companies of Mexicans came down the causeway, wounding us all, including the horsemen. Sandoval too received a stone full in the face. But Pedro de Alvarado and some other horsemen went to his assistance. As so many bands were coming on, and only I and twenty soldiers were opposing them, Sandoval ordered us to retire gradually in order to save the horses; and because we did not retire as quickly as he wished he turned on us furiously and said: 'Do you want me and all my horsemen to be killed because of you? For my sake, Bernal Díaz, my friend, please fall back!' Then Sandoval received another wound, and so did his horse. By this time we had got our allies off the causeway; and facing the enemy and never turning our backs, we gradually retired, forming a kind of dam to hold up their advance. Some of our crossbowmen and musketeers shot while others were loading, the horsemen made charges, and Pedro Moreno loaded and fired his cannon. Yet despite the number of Mexicans that were swept away by his shot we could not keep them at bay. On the contrary, they continued to pursue us, in the belief that they would carry us off that night to be sacrificed.

When we had retired almost to our quarters, across a great opening full of water, their arrows, darts, and stones could no longer reach us. Sandoval, Francisco de Lugo, and Andres de Tapia were standing with Pedro de Alvarado, each one telling his story and discussing Cortes' orders, when the dismal drum of Huichilobos sounded again, accompanied by conches, horns, and trumpet-like instruments. It was a terrifying sound, and when we looked at the tall *cue* from which it came we saw our comrades who had been captured in Cortes' defeat being dragged up the steps to be sacrificed. When they had hauled them up to a small platform in front of the shrine where they

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kept their accursed idols we saw them put plumes on the heads of many of them; and then they made them dance with a sort of fan in front of Huichilobos. Then after they had danced the *papas* laid them down on their backs on some narrow stones of sacrifice and, cutting open their chests, drew out their palpitating hearts which they offered to the idols before them. Then they kicked the bodies down the steps, and the Indian butchers who were waiting below cut off their arms and legs and flayed their faces, which they afterwards prepared like glove leather, with their beards on, and kept for their drunken festivals. Then they ate their flesh with a sauce of peppers and tomatoes. They sacrificed all our men in this way, eating their legs and arms, offering their hearts and blood to their idols as I have said, and throwing their trunks and entrails to the lions and tigers and serpents and snakes that they kept in the wild-beast houses I have described in an earlier chapter.

On seeing these atrocities, all of us in our camp said to one another: 'Thank God they did not carry me off to be sacrificed!' My readers must remember that though we were not far off we could do nothing to help, and could only pray God to guard us from such a death. Then at the very moment of the sacrifice, great bands of Mexicans suddenly fell upon us and kept us busy on all sides. We could find no way of holding them. 'Look!' they shouted, 'that is the way you will all die, as our gods have many times promised us,' and the threats they shouted at our Tlascalan allies were so cruel and so frightening that they lost their spirit. The Mexicans threw them roasted legs of Indians and the arms of our soldiers with cries of: 'Eat the flesh of these *Teules* and of your brothers, for we are gluttons with it. You can stuff yourselves on our leavings. Now see these houses you have pulled down. We shall make you build them again, much finer, with white stone and fine masonry. So go on helping the *Teules*. You will see them all sacrificed.'

Guatemoc did something more after his victory. He sent the hands and feet of our soldiers, and the skin of their faces, and the heads of the horses that had been killed, to all the towns of our allies and friends and their relations, with the message that as more than half of us were dead and he would soon finish off

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the rest, they had better break their alliance with us and come to Mexico, because if they did not desert us quickly he would come and destroy them.

The Mexicans went on attacking us by day and night; and we all kept guard together, Gonzalo de Sandoval, Pedro de Alvarado, and all the other captains included. So although great bands of warriors came by night, we were able to repel them. Both by day and night half the horsemen remained in Tacuba and the other half on the causeway. But this was not all the harm we suffered. The enemy returned and reopened all the channels that we had blocked since we had first advanced along the causeway, and built even stronger barricades than before. Then our friends from the cities on the lake who had recently allied themselves to us and were coming to help us with their canoes decided that they had 'come for wool but gone away shorn'. For many of them lost their lives and many went home wounded, and more than half their canoes were destroyed. But even so they did not help the Mexicans any more, for they loathed them. They stood aside, however, and watched events.

Then Gonzalo de Sandoval and his fellow captains and soldiers who had come to our camp thought they had better return to their posts and report the state in which they had found us. They told Cortes that Pedro de Alvarado was exercising great caution; and Sandoval, who felt friendly towards me, told him how he had found me and other soldiers fighting up to our waists in the water. He said that but for us the crew of the stranded launch would all have been killed, and said many things in my praise which became known throughout the camp but which I will not repeat here. When Cortes realized that we were exercising great caution, he was much relieved, and from that time onwards he ordered the men of all three camps to fight the Mexicans neither too much nor too little. By this he meant that we were not to worry about capturing any bridge or barricade, and only to go out to fight in defence of our camp. Day had hardly dawned, however, when they attacked it again, hurling all their missiles and shouting hideous abuse. But as we were protected by a very deep channel we remained for four days without crossing it.

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[For five days the three forces of Spaniards stayed in their respective camps, sustaining and repelling repeated attacks.]

Let us cease talking of the great attacks they made on us, and tell how our allies the Tlascalans and the people of Cholula and Huexotzinco, and even those of Texcoco, Chalco, and Tlamanalco, decided to return home and went off without the knowledge of Cortes, Pedro de Alvarado, or Sandoval. The only chiefs who remained in Cortes' camp were Ahuaxpitzactzin, the brave man who was afterwards baptized Don Carlos and was the brother of Don Fernando, the lord of Texcoco, and some forty of his relatives and friends; and in Sandoval's camp another *Cacique* from Huexotzinco with about fifty men; and in our camp two sons of Lorenzo de Vargas, and Chichimecatecle the brave, with about eighty Tlascalans, his relations and vassals. Of the twenty-four thousand allies we had brought with us, only about two hundred remained in our three camps; all the rest had gone home.

When we found ourselves abandoned by our allies, Cortes and Sandoval asked those who remained in their respective camps why the rest had gone. They replied that they had observed the Mexicans consulting their idols during the night, and the idols had promised that we and they would all be killed. Our allies had believed this to be true and had departed in fear. What made this prophecy seem more credible to them was that many of us had indeed been killed and all the rest wounded, and they themselves had lost more than twelve hundred men. They feared, therefore, that the rest of us would be killed too. Moreover, Xicotenga the Younger, whom Cortes had hanged, had always told them that he knew by his magic we should all be killed and not a Tlascalan would remain alive. These were the reasons for their desertion.

Although Cortes showed his distress in private he told them with a cheerful smile that they need not be afraid, for what the Mexicans said was a lie intended to discourage them. He made them such promises and spoke to them so affectionately that he gave them the courage to stay, and we did the same to Chichimecatecle and the two young Xicotengas. In his conversation with Cortes, Don Carlos, who was a brave man, answered: 'Lord

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Malinche, do not be distressed that you cannot fight the Mexicans every day. Get your leg well, and follow my advice, which is to stay in camp for some days and tell Tonatio and Sandoval to do the same. But keep the launches busy by day and night, to prevent their bringing in food or water. There are so many thousand bands of warriors in the city that they are bound to eat up all the provisions they have, and the water they are now drinking is brackish, for it comes from pools they themselves have dug. They are catching the rainwater and making do with that. But if you stop their food and water, how can they go on? They will suffer worse from hunger than from war.'

When this was translated for him, Cortes threw his arms round Don Carlos's neck and thanked him, and promised that he would give him towns. Many of us soldiers had already discussed the idea, but we were so impatient that we did not want to wait so long before advancing into the city. When Cortes had thoroughly considered the *Cacique's* advice (although we had already sent a proposal to the same effect, and his own captains and soldiers had made the same suggestion) he sent two launches to Sandoval's camp and two to ours, with orders that we should wait another three days before entering the city. As the Mexicans were then victorious he did not dare to send one launch alone, and therefore sent them in pairs.

One thing was of great help to us, that our launches now had the courage to break the stakes placed in the lake to impale them. They did it by rowing with all their strength, and to give their spurt greater impetus they started it some distance back, and got the wind into their sails as well. So they became masters of the lake, and of a good many isolated groups of houses; and when the Mexicans saw this they lost some of their spirit.

But to return to our battle. Having now no allies, we ourselves began to fill in the great channel, which, as I have said before, was close to our camp. The first company on the rota worked hard at carrying bricks and timber, while the other two companies did the fighting. (I have explained our system of rotation before.) And in the four days that we all worked together we had it completely blocked and levelled off. Cortes

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did the same in his camp, where they followed the same plan, and he worked himself, carrying bricks and timber, until the bridges and gaps were filled and the causeway secure enough to allow of a safe retreat. Sandoval too followed the same course. With our launches close by and no longer afraid of their stakes, we then began to advance little by little.

[The fighting continued in the same way as before, the Spaniards advancing each day along the causeways, though this time without allies, and retiring each night. The Mexican attacks were persistent, but thanks to the relative freedom of the launches and the effectiveness of Pedro Moreno's cannon, the danger diminished. Each night, however, the Mexicans sacrificed a further batch of the prisoners taken from Cortes, and this continued for ten successive nights.]

Each day we had very hard battles, but we continued to capture bridges and barricades and to master the channels; and our launches were of great assistance, since they could go wherever they wished on the lake and were not afraid of the stakes. Twelve or thirteen days had now passed since Cortes' defeat, and Don Carlos saw that we were recovering strength. Realizing that the Mexicans had been wrong when they said they would kill us all within ten days, which was what their idols had promised them, he sent to advise his brother Don Fernando to send Cortes all the warriors he could get from Texcoco, and within two days of his sending this message more than two thousand warriors arrived.

When Cortes saw this fine reinforcement he was highly delighted and spoke most flatteringly to them. At the same time many Tlascalans returned with their captains, and a *Cacique* named Tepaneca from Topeyanco was their commander. Many Indians also came from Huexotzingo and a very few from Cholula. When Cortes heard the news, he ordered that all our allies should come to his camp when they arrived, so that he could speak to them. But before they came he ordered guards of our soldiers to be placed on the roads, to protect them in case the Mexicans attacked, and when they stood before him, he made them a speech through Doña Marina and Jeronimo de Aguilar, saying that they well understood the good will he had felt and still felt towards them, both for the obedience they had given

to His Majesty and for the good work they had done for us. If, when we reached the city, he had ordered them to join us in destroying the Mexicans, it had been his intention, he said, to benefit them and send them home rich, and give them vengeance on their enemies. Our purpose in capturing that great city would not be merely to benefit him. Although he had always found them willing and they had helped him in every way, he continued, we had sent them off the causeways each day because we were less hampered when we fought without them, since, as he had told them before, He who gave us victory and aid in everything was our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we believed. Because they had deserted at the most critical moment of the war, and left their captains in the lurch when the fighting was hardest, they deserved execution. But since they did not understand our laws and ordinances he pardoned them. However, so that they should understand the situation better, he pointed out that we were still pulling down houses and taking barricades without them; and he ordered them to kill no Mexicans in future, for he wished to win them by kindness. After making this speech, he embraced Chichimecatecle and the two young Xicotengas and Don Carlos, and promised that he would add to the territory and vassals they then held. He then sent them away, each one to his own camp.

I am tired of writing about battles, and was even more tired when I had to take part in them, and my readers may well be just as tired of my prolixity. For ninety-three days¹ we were fighting continuously, but I must now be excused if I call no more battles to mind.

To return to our story, as we advanced from all three camps into the city, we came to the pool from which they drew the brackish water I have spoken of, and destroyed it so that they should make no more use of it. It was guarded by some Mexicans with whom we had a brush. But we could now move freely along all the streets we had captured, for they had been levelled and were no longer broken up by channels. Consequently our horsemen had freedom of manoeuvre.

As soon as Cortes saw that we were capturing bridges, cause-

1. This figure is probably incorrect.

ways, and barricades in the city and destroying the houses, he ordered three Mexican captains, men of importance whom we had captured, to go to Guatemoc and induce him to make peace. The chieftains replied that they dared not carry such a message, for their lord Guatemoc would certainly have them killed. Nevertheless, after further conversations in which Cortes made them promises and gave them some cloth, they set out. The message they carried to Guatemoc was that Cortes had a great regard for him as a close relative and son-in-law of his friend the great Montezuma, and that he would be sorry if that great city were totally destroyed. To avoid the daily slaughter of its inhabitants and their neighbours, therefore, he begged Guatemoc to make peace, and promised not only to pardon in His Majesty's name all the deaths and damage they had inflicted on us, but to do him some favours also. He reminded the prince that he had already sent this message four times, but owing to his youth and bad advisers, and principally because of the evil counsel offered him by his idols and their *papas*, Guatemoc had refused to make peace and had preferred war. But already he had seen what slaughter these battles cost him, how all the cities and towns in the neighbourhood were now on our side, and that every day more were rising against him. While condoling with him on such a loss of vassals and cities, Cortes said that we knew they had exhausted their provisions and run out of water; and he said other things that were much to the point. Although this message was thoroughly explained to them by our interpreters, the three chieftains asked Cortes for a letter, not because it would be understood but because they knew that when we sent a message or command it was always on paper – which they call *amales* in their language – as a sign that it was an order.

When the three messengers appeared before Guatemoc with tears in their eyes, they conveyed to him the burden of Cortes' message; and when Guatemoc heard it, as we afterwards learnt, he burst into a rage with them, in the presence of his captains, for daring to bring such a proposal. He was, however, as we afterwards learnt, inclined to make peace, and he called together his chieftains and captains and the *papas* of his idols to discuss

the matter, telling them that he had no wish to fight against Malinche and the rest of us. He said in his address that he had done all he could to beat us in war and had changed his method of fighting many times, but that we were men of such a kind that whenever they thought they had conquered us we turned on them more vigorously than before. Moreover, he knew that we had recently been joined by great hosts of allies and that all the cities were against him, and that our launches had now broken through their lines of stakes, and our horsemen were galloping through all the streets of the city. Guatemoc put before them their many other difficulties with food and water, and begged or commanded each one of them to give his opinion and not be fearful of speaking the truth. The reply of Guatemoc's counsellors seems to have been: 'Great lord, you are our king and you exercise your office nobly. You have shown your courage in all things, and the kingdom is yours by right. The peace you speak of as good is illusory. Consider how, ever since the *Teules* entered this land and this city, things have gone from bad to worse with us. Think of the benefits and presents that your uncle the great Montezuma bestowed on them and of his death. Think of the fate of his successor, your cousin Cacamatzin, and of what befell your relations, the lords or Iztapalapa, Coyoacan, Tacuba, and Talatzingo, and the sons of our great Montezuma. All are dead. All the gold and riches of this city have been destroyed, and they have enslaved and branded the faces of all your subjects and vassals at Chalco and Tepeaca and at Texcoco, and in all your cities and towns. But before this, consider what your gods have promised you and reflect well upon it. Do not trust Malinche and his flattering words. It is better that we should all die fighting in this city than see ourselves in the power of those who would enslave us and torture us for gold.'

At the same time the *papas* also announced that for the past three nights, at the time when they offered the sacrifice, their idols had promised them victory. Then Guatemoc replied somewhat angrily: 'If that is what you want, take good care of the maize and provisions we possess, and let us all die fighting. From now on, let no one dare ask me to make peace or I will

have him killed.' Then they all promised to fight night and day in defence of the city. When this was settled they arranged with the people of Xochimilco and other towns to bring water in canoes by night, and dug pools in other places where some existed, although it was rather brackish.

Cortes and the army waited two days for their reply without advancing any further into the city. Then to our surprise great bands of Indian warriors came against all three camps and attacked us fiercely, like brave lions who hoped to carry us off. This is what happened at Pedro de Alvarado's camp, but they say that the attacks on Cortes and Sandoval were just as fierce, and that despite the number of Indians they killed and wounded they could scarcely hold their own. In the course of battle, Guatemoc's horn would be sounded, and then we had to close our ranks to avoid being overwhelmed. For, as I have said before, in their endeavours to lay hands on us they impaled themselves on our swords and lances. Being already used to these attacks, however, for some of us were killed and wounded every day, we fought them off hand to hand for six or seven days in succession, inflicting great casualties on them. They were not discouraged by this, however, for they cared nothing for death in battle. They said, as I remember: 'Why does Malinche ask us every day to make peace with you? Our idols have promised us victory, we have plenty of food and water, and we shall not let one of you survive. So do not talk to us any more about peace: words are for women, arms for men.' With these words they came on us like mad dogs, without a thought for their lives, and the fighting lasted till nightfall, when we cautiously retired to our huts.

We held out like this for many days, during which time things changed for the worse once more, and the Mexicans collected an army from the three provinces of Matlazingo, Malinalco, and another whose name I forget (it was twenty-five or thirty miles from Mexico) to fall on us from the rear and attack our camps. At the same time the Mexicans themselves planned to come out from the city, and thus we should be caught between two forces and, as they expected, routed.

Matlazingo and Malinalco and Tulapa were among the places

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to which Guatemoc had sent the heads of the horses and the flayed faces and hands and feet of the soldiers they had sacrificed; and when they received his message the prince's relations in these towns had promptly assembled all the forces they could raise to come to the assistance of Mexico and their kinsman Guatemoc. They were already on their way against us when they passed three towns of our allies, which they began to attack, robbing their farms and maize-fields, and killing their children for sacrifice. These towns sent post-haste to Cortes for help and assistance, and he at once dispatched Andres de Tapia with twenty horsemen, a hundred soldiers, and many of our Tlascalcan allies to help them; which they did so effectively that they drove the enemy back to their towns and then returned to camp.

Cortes was delighted by the news of their defeat, but almost immediately other messages came from the town of Cuernavaca to claim assistance against the people of these same three provinces, who were descending upon them. This time he sent Gonzalo de Sandoval with twenty horsemen and eighty soldiers, the soundest in all three camps – myself and some of my friends among them – and many of our allies. God knows that those who remained behind were in danger of their lives, for they were all wounded and had no restoratives. A great deal might be told about what we did under Sandoval's command, and how he defeated the enemy. But I will confine myself to saying that we quickly returned to relieve our own camp, bringing with us two chieftains of Matlazingo, and leaving the towns at peace again.

[Cortes once more requested Guatemoc to sue for peace, but was refused. The enemy's attacks were intensified, but then began to flag. The Spaniards' powder ran out in all three camps, but a new ship arrived, and supplies were sent up from Vera Cruz.]

To return to our conquest of the city. To be brief, Cortes settled with his captains and soldiers that we should push forward until we reached Tlatelolco, the great market-place where there were seven lofty *cues* and shrines, and our three companies advanced each from its own side, capturing bridges and

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barricades. Cortes got as far as a small square in which there were some other shrines and small towers, and in one of the houses there were some upright posts on which they had put the heads of many of our Spaniards whom they had killed and sacrificed during the recent battles. Their hair and beards had grown much longer than they were in life; which I would never have believed if I had not seen it. I recognized three of my fellow soldiers, and to see them in this condition saddened our hearts. We left them where they were for the time being, but they were taken down twelve days later, when we took away those and other heads that had been offered to the idols and buried them in a church that we built, which is called the Martyrs, near the bridge named Alvarado's Leap.

Enough of this. Let me say that Pedro de Alvarado's men advanced fighting till they reached Tlatelolco. There were so many Mexicans guarding their idols and tall shrines and they had raised so many barricades that it took us quite two hours before we could capture them or get inside. Now that the horses had room to gallop, they were of great assistance even though most of them were wounded, for the horsemen speared many Mexicans. As the enemy were so numerous, our ten companies were divided into three parts to fight against them; and Pedro de Alvarado ordered one, under the command of Gutierrez de Badajoz, to ascend the hundred and fourteen steps of the *cue* of Huichilcbos. He fought very well against the enemy warriors and against the many *papas* in the shrines. But the Mexicans attacked him so hard that they sent him rolling down ten or twelve steps, and we had to go promptly to his rescue. As we advanced the enemy bands kept close to us, and we were in great peril of our lives. Nevertheless we climbed to the top, set the shrines on fire, burnt the idols, and planted our banners there; and after we had fired the shrines we fought on the ground until nightfall, but we could do nothing against so many warriors.

Next day, when Cortes and his captains saw from where they were fighting in a distant quarter of the city the great blaze of the tall *cue* burning (for the Mexicans had not put the fire out) and our banners planted at the top, he was greatly delighted and wished that he were there himself. They even say he was

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envious, but he could not have got there, for he was nearly a mile away and there were still many bridges and channels to be captured. Wherever he turned he was fiercely attacked; and he could not penetrate as fast as he wished into the heart of the city, as we of Alvarado's company had done. However, within four days both Cortes and Sandoval joined us, and we could pass along the streets from one camp to another over demolished houses and over bridges, barricades, and channels, every one of which had been levelled.

Guatemoc and all his warriors were now retreating to a part of the city that stood in the lake, for the houses and palaces in which he had lived were razed to the ground. Yet every day they came out to attack us, and pursued us as hotly as ever as soon as the time came for us to retreat. When some days had passed and Cortes saw that they were not coming to sue for peace and had no thought of doing so, he consulted all our captains and decided that we must lay some ambuscades. This is how we did it. From all three camps we collected about thirty horsemen and a hundred soldiers, the most active and pugnacious that Cortes could find, and he sent to summon a thousand Tlascalans from all three camps. Then we took up our position in some large houses that had belonged to a Mexican lord. This we did early in the morning, and Cortes then advanced along the streets and causeways with the rest of his horsemen, and his soldiers, crossbowmen, and musketeers, fighting in the usual way and pretending to be filling in the bridge over a certain channel. The Mexican bands detailed for the task were already fighting him, also many others whom Guatemoc had sent to guard the bridge. On seeing the enemy's great numbers, Cortes pretended to retreat, and ordered that the allies should be got off the causeway, so that the Mexicans should believe he was retiring. They came and followed him, at first slowly, but when they saw him act as if he were really in flight, all the troops on the causeway came after him and attacked him. As soon as he knew that they had advanced just beyond the houses in which the ambush was placed, he ordered two shots to be fired close together, as a signal for us to emerge from our hiding place. The horsemen came out first, followed by all of us

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soldiers, and we fell on the enemy unopposed. Cortes then quickly faced his men about, and our friends the Tlascalans did great damage to the enemy. Thus many of them were killed and wounded, and thereafter they did not follow us when we retired. Another ambush was laid for them in Alvarado's camp, but it came to nothing.

When we were all in Tlatelolco, Cortes ordered all the companies to take up their quarters and keep watch there, because we had almost two miles to come from our camp to the place where we were then fighting. We spent three days there without doing anything of importance. For Cortes ordered us not to advance any further into the city or demolish any more houses since he intended to summon the enemy once more to make peace. So while we were in Tlatelolco, Cortes sent to Guatemoc begging him to surrender and not to be afraid. He undertook with solemn promises that the prince's person should be scrupulously respected and honoured, and that he should continue to rule Mexico and all his territory and cities just as before; and Cortes sent him a gift of provisions – maize-cakes, poultry, prickly pears, and chocolate – for he had nothing else to send. Guatemoc consulted his captains, and the advice they gave him was to say that he desired peace but would wait three days before giving an answer. Then, when this time had elapsed, Guatemoc and Cortes would meet to discuss terms, but in the interval he would have the opportunity to learn more fully the wishes of his god Huichilobos in this matter, also to mend bridges, make openings in the causeway, prepare arrows, javelins, and stones, and build barricades.

Guatemoc sent four Mexican chieftains with his reply, and we believed that his desire for peace was genuine. Cortes ordered that these messengers should be given plenty to eat and drink, and then sent them back to Guatemoc with more food of the same kind as before. Then Guatemoc sent other messengers with a gift of two fine cloaks, and they said the prince would come as soon as everything was ready. To waste no more words on this matter, Guatemoc never intended to come, for his counsellors had advised him not to trust Cortes, and had reminded him of the fate of his uncle the great Montezuma and

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his relations, and of the destruction of all the Mexican nobility. They advised him to plead illness, and then to send out all his warriors in the hope that his gods would be pleased to grant them the victory they had so often promised.

We waited for Guatemoc in vain. But no sooner did we understand his deceit than many battalions of Mexicans came out under their distinguishing signs in the direction of our camp and Sandoval's. They seemed to have started the battle all over again. As we were somewhat off our guard, believing that they had already settled for peace, many of our men were wounded, three of them mortally. They also wounded two horses, but they did not get away with much advantage, for we paid them out well. After this onslaught Cortes ordered us to attack them again and advance into those parts of the city where they had taken refuge. When they saw us capturing the whole city, Guatemoc sent two chieftains to tell Cortes he wished to speak to him across a channel. Cortes was to stand on one bank and he on another, and they fixed the time for the morning of the next day. Cortes kept the appointment, but Guatemoc refused to come. He sent some chieftains instead, to explain that their master dared not appear for fear we would shoot at him with our guns and crossbows during the conversations and he would be killed. Cortes then swore to him that he would not be harmed in any way, but to no purpose. They would not believe him, and said they knew the value of his word. Just then two of the chieftains who were speaking to Cortes took some maize-cakes, the leg of a fowl, and some cherries out of a bag that they were carrying, and sat down to a leisurely meal, so that we should suppose that they were not hungry; and on seeing this, Cortes sent them word that since they did not want to make peace, he would soon enter all their houses to see if they had any maize or any more poultry. We went on in this way for another four or five days without attacking them, and during this time many poor Indians who had nothing to eat came to our camp exhausted with hunger. In view of this, Cortes ordered that we should not attack, for perhaps they would change their minds about ending the war. But even though we sent to entreat them, they would not make peace.

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There was a soldier in Cortes' camp who said that he had been in Italy, in the Great Captain's company, and was in the affair at Garellano and other great battles. He talked a good deal about war-engines, and said he could make a catapult in Tlatelolco which, if they were to bombard the quarter of the city into which Guatemoc retreated, would make them sue for peace in two days. He talked so much about it, for this man was a great talker, that Cortes promptly set to work on the catapult. They brought lime and stone and wood, as the soldier requested, and carpenters and nails and all that was needed for its construction. They made two slings of strong rope and cords, and brought up great stones bigger than demijohn jars, and when the catapult was made and rigged as he desired, the soldier said that it was ready to be discharged. So they placed a suitable stone in the sling, but all it did was to rise to the height of the catapult and fall back to its original place. Cortes was very annoyed with the deviser of the catapult and with himself for having believed him. He said the man had proved that nothing was more prejudicial to war than talk, and that the whole matter had been one of talk for talking's sake; and he at once ordered the catapult to be taken to pieces. Cortes now knew that the Mexicans did not wish for any sort of peace, so when he saw that the catapult was quite useless, he ordered Gonzalo de Sandoval to invade that part of the city in which Guatemoc had taken refuge with all the flower of his captains and of the Mexican nobility, but not to kill or wound any Indians unless they should attack him, and if they did so, only to defend himself and do them no harm. He was, however, to destroy their houses and the many defences they had erected in the lake. Cortes himself ascended the great *cue* of Tlatelolco to watch Sandoval's advance.

Sandoval went forward vigorously with his launches towards the place where Guatemoc's houses stood, and when Guatemoc found himself surrounded he was afraid he would be taken or killed. He had prepared fifty large pirogues with good oarsmen, so that when he saw himself hard pressed he could escape and hide in some reed-beds, from which he would be able to reach land and conceal himself again in another town, and had given

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instructions to his captains, and the principal persons whom he had with him in that part of the city, that they should do the same.

When they saw the launches getting in among the houses, these people embarked in their fifty canoes, in which they had already placed Guatemoc's property, gold, and jewels, and all his family and women. Then he himself embarked and shot out into the lake, accompanied by many captains. At the same moment many more canoes set out, and soon the lake was full of them. Immediately on receiving news that Guatemoc was escaping, Sandoval ordered all his launches to stop destroying the houses and defences and follow the flight of the canoes. He told them to keep track of where Guatemoc was going, and not to molest him or do him any harm, but simply to try to capture him.

Sandoval instructed a certain Garcia Holguin, a friend of Sandoval's who was captain of a very fast launch with good sails and good sailors, to follow him in the direction in which they said Guatemoc and his pirogues were going, and capture him if he could overtake him. Sandoval himself went in another direction with a number of other launches. It pleased our Lord God that Garcia Holguin should overtake Guatemoc's fleet, which by its rich decorations, its awnings, and royal seat he recognized as the craft in which the Lord of Mexico was travelling. Holguin signed to them to stop, but they refused, so he made as if to shoot at them with muskets and crossbows. This alarmed Guatemoc, who cried out: 'Do not shoot. I am the king of this city. Guatemoc is my name. Please do not interfere with the things I am taking with me, or disturb my wife or relatives, but take me at once to Malinche.' Holguin was delighted to hear these words, and embraced Guatemoc very respectfully. He placed him in the launch with his wife and about thirty chieftains, seating him in the poop on some cloths and mats, and gave them some of his own food to eat, and he touched nothing in the canoes that carried Guatemoc's property, but brought them along with the launch.

By this time Gonzalo de Sandoval had ordered all the launches to come back, for he knew that Holguin had captured Guatemoc

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and was taking him to Cortes. On receiving the news he told the oarsmen in his own launch to make all possible speed and, overtaking Holguin, claimed the prisoner. Holguin refused his demand, saying that he and not Sandoval had made the capture. Sandoval replied that this was so, but that he was commander of the launches and Garcia Holguin sailed under his command and banner, and that it was for reasons of friendship and because Holguin's launch was the fastest that he had ordered him to follow and take Guatemoc, who must now be surrendered to him as commander. Holguin, however, persisted in his refusal; and at that moment another launch went at high speed to Cortes to ask for a reward for the good news. Cortes was still at Tlatelolco, not far away, watching Sandoval's advance from the top of the *cue*, and when he was informed of the dispute between Sandoval and Holguin he at once dispatched Captain Luis Marin and Francisco de Verdugo to summon them both to come immediately in their launches, and to bring Guatemoc and his wife and family with every mark of respect. He said he would himself settle whose prisoner Guatemoc was and to whom the honour of his capture was due. While they were bringing him in, Cortes ordered as good a guest-chamber to be prepared as was possible at that time, with mats and cloths and seats, and plenty of Cortes' own food. Sandoval and Holguin soon arrived with Guatemoc, and both together led him up to Cortes. On appearing before him Guatemoc treated our Captain with great respect, and Cortes, embracing him joyfully, treated him and his captains with a great show of affection. 'Lord Malinche,' said Guatemoc, 'I have assuredly done my duty in defence of my city and my vassals, and I can do no more. I am brought by force as a prisoner into your presence and beneath your power. Take the dagger that you have in your belt, and strike me dead immediately.' He sobbed as he spoke and the tears fell from his eyes, and the other great lords whom he brought with him wept also. Cortes answered him very kindly through our interpreters that he admired him greatly for having had the bravery to defend his city, and did not blame him at all. On the contrary, he thought rather well than ill of him for having done so. What he wished, however, was that he had

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sued for peace of his own accord when his defeat was certain, and had thus prevented so much of his city from being destroyed, and so many of his Mexicans from losing their lives. But now all this had happened, there was no help for it. Nothing could be mended. Let his spirit and the spirit of his captains be at rest. For he should rule over Mexico and his provinces as before.

Guatemoc and his captains thanked Cortes for this assurance. Then Cortes asked after his wife and the other great ladies, wives of other captains, whom he knew to have come with the prince; and Guatemoc himself answered that he had begged Gonzalo de Sandoval and Garcia Holguin to leave them in their canoes while he came to learn Malinche's orders. Cortes at once sent for them, and ordered that they should be given of the best we had in the camp to eat. Then, as it was late and it was beginning to rain, he arranged for them to be sent to Coyoacan and, taking Guatemoc, his family, and household, and many other chieftains with him, he ordered Pedro de Alvarado, Gonzalo de Sandoval, and the other captains each to go to his own camp and quarters. We went to Tacuba, Sandoval to Tepeaquilla, and Cortes himself to Coyoacan. Guatemoc and his captains were captured on the evening of 13 August 1521. Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ and Our Lady the Virgin Mary, His Blessed Mother.

It rained and thundered that evening, and the lightning flashed, and up to midnight heavier rain fell than usual. After Guatemoc's capture all we soldiers became as deaf as if all the bells in a belfry had been ringing and had then suddenly stopped. I say this because during the whole ninety-three days of our siege of the capital, Mexican captains were yelling and shouting night and day, mustering the bands of warriors who were to fight on the causeway, and calling to the men in the canoes who were to attack the launches and struggle with us on the bridges and build barricades, or to those who were driving in piles, and deepening and widening the channels and bridges, and building breastworks, or to those who were making javelins and arrows, or to the women shaping rounded stones for their slings. Then there was the unceasing sound of their accursed drums and trumpets, and their melancholy kettle-

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drums in the shrines and on their temple towers. Both day and night the din was so great that we could hardly hear one another speak. But after Guatemoc's capture, all the shouting and the other noises ceased, which is why I have made the comparison with a belfry.

Guatemoc was very delicate, both in body and features. His face was long but cheerful, and when his eyes dwelt on you they seemed more grave than gentle, and did not waver. He was twenty-six, and his complexion was rather lighter than the brown of most Indians. They said he was a nephew of Montezuma, the son of one of his sisters; and he was married to one of Montezuma's daughters, a young and beautiful woman.

Before we go any further, let me relate how the dispute between Sandoval and Garcia Holguin ended. After telling them a story about a similar quarrel in Roman times between Marius and Cornelius Sulla, Cortes said he would refer the question to His Majesty, as to which of the two he would permit to incorporate the capture in his coat-of-arms, since the decision must come from Spain; and two years later an order came from His Majesty that in the ornaments of his coat-of-arms Cortes should have seven kings: Montezuma, the great lord of Mexico; Cacamatzin, the lord of Texcoco, and the lords of Iztapalapa, Coyoacan, Tacuba, and another, a nephew of Montezuma, to whom they said the Caciqueship of Mexico would fall – he was lord of Matlazingo and other provinces – and lastly this Guatemoc about whom the dispute arose.

Now to speak of the dead bodies and heads that were in the houses where Guatemoc had taken refuge. I solemnly swear that all the houses and stockades in the lake were full of heads and corpses. I do not know how to describe it but it was the same in the streets and courts of Tlatelolco. We could not walk without treading on the bodies and heads of dead Indians. I have read about the destruction of Jerusalem, but I do not think the mortality was greater there than here in Mexico, where most of the warriors who had crowded in from all the provinces and subject towns had died. As I have said, the dry land and the stockades were piled with corpses. Indeed, the stench was so bad that no one could endure it, and for that

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reason each of us captains returned to his camp after Guatemoc's capture; even Cortes was ill from the odours which assailed his nostrils and from headache during those days in Tlatelolco.

The soldiers in the launches came off best and gained most spoil, because they were able to go to the houses in certain quarters of the lake where they knew there was cloth, gold, and treasure. They also searched the reed-beds in which the Mexicans had hidden their property when we were assaulting some quarter or group of houses. Under cover of chasing the canoes that were bringing in food and water, they would sometimes capture some chieftains fleeing to the mainland to take refuge in the towns of their neighbours the Otomis, and would rob them of everything they had. We soldiers, on the other hand, who were fighting on the causeways and on land, gained no profit, but plenty of arrows and lance-thrusts and wounds from darts and stones. For when we captured houses, the inhabitants had already carried off any property they possessed, since we could not go through the water without first blocking the gaps and bridges. Therefore, as I said when speaking of Cortes' search for sailors to go in the launches, they were better off than we who fought on land. This was clearly proved when Cortes demanded Montezuma's treasure from Guatemoc and his captains. They told him that the men in the launches had stolen most of it.

As there was such a stench in the city, Guatemoc asked Cortes' permission for all the Mexican forces who remained there to go out to the neighbouring towns, and they were promptly told to do so. For three whole days and nights they never ceased streaming out, and all three causeways were crowded with men, women, and children so thin, sallow, dirty, and stinking that it was pitiful to see them. Once the city was free from them Cortes went out to inspect it. We found the houses full of corpses, and some poor Mexicans still in them who could not move away. Their excretions were the sort of filth that thin swine pass which have been fed on nothing but grass. The city looked as if it had been ploughed up. The roots of any edible greenery had been dug out, boiled, and eaten, and they had even cooked the bark of some of the trees. There was

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no fresh water to be found; all of it was brackish. I must also remark that the Mexicans did not eat the flesh of their own people, only that of our men and our Tlascalan allies whom they had captured. There had been no live births for a long time, because they had suffered so much from hunger and thirst and continual fighting.

Cortes ordered a banquet to be held in Coyoacan to celebrate the capture of the city, and got plenty of wine for the purpose from a ship that had just come from Spain to Villa Rica, also some pigs that had been brought to him from Cuba. He invited all of us captains and soldiers whom he thought worthy of consideration, from all three camps. But when we came to the banquet there were not enough seats or tables for even a third of the invited guests. Consequently there was much disorder. So many discreditable things occurred, indeed, that it would have been better if the banquet had never been held.¹

Now that our daily and nightly battles with the Mexicans are far away in the past, for which I give great thanks to God who delivered me from them, there is one thing that I wish to relate, which happened to me after seeing the death by sacrifice of the sixty-two soldiers who were carried off alive. What I am going to say may seem to some to arise from my lack of any great inclination for battle. But, on the contrary, anyone will see on reflection that it was due rather to the excessive daring with which I had to risk my life in the thickest of the fighting. For great courage was at that time required of a soldier. I must say that when I saw my comrades dragged up each day to the altar, and their chests struck open and their palpitating hearts drawn out, and when I saw the arms and legs of these sixty-two men cut off and eaten, I feared that one day or another they would do the same to me. Twice already they had laid hands on me to drag me off, but it pleased God that I should escape from their clutches. When I remembered their hideous deaths, and the proverb that the little pitcher goes many times to the

1. Bernal Díaz describes a general scene of drunkenness, ending in a dance in which the soldiers, still wearing their cotton armour, led out such Spanish ladies as were there. He scratched this paragraph out in his manuscript, however.

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fountain, and so on, I came to fear death more than ever in the past. Before I went into battle, a sort of horror and gloom would seize my heart, and I would make water once or twice and commend myself to God and His blessed Mother. It was always like this before battle, but my fear quickly left me.

It must seem very strange to my readers that I should have suffered from this unaccustomed terror. For I had taken part in many battles, from the time when I made the voyage of discovery with Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba till the defeat of our army on the causeway under Alvarado. But up to that time when I saw the cruel deaths inflicted on our comrades before our very eyes, I had never felt such fear as I did in these last battles. Let those experienced in soldiering, who have been at times in great peril of death, say whether my fear is to be attributed to faint-heartedness or to excessive valour. For, as I have said, my own opinion is that having to thrust myself when fighting into such dangerous positions, I was bound to fear death more at that time than at others. Besides, I was not always in good health. I was many times severely wounded, and for this reason was not able to go on all the expeditions. Still, the hardships and risks of death to which I was personally exposed were not insignificant, either before the capture of Mexico or afterwards.

The first orders Cortes gave to Guatemoc were that the conduits from Chapultepec should be repaired and restored to their former condition, so that the water could flow again into the city; that the streets should be cleared of the bodies and heads of the dead, which should be buried, so that the city should be left clean and free from any stench; that all bridges and causeways should be thoroughly restored to their former condition, and the palaces and houses rebuilt so as to be fit for habitation within two months. He marked out the parts in which the Indians were to settle, and those which were to be left clear for us.

Guatemoc and his captains complained to Cortes that many of our men had carried off the daughters and wives of chieftains, and begged him as a favour that they should be sent back. Cortes answered that it would be difficult to take them from their present masters, but they might seek them out and bring them before him, and he would see whether they had become

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Christians or preferred to go home with their fathers and husbands, in which case he would order them to be given up. So he gave the Mexicans permission to search in all three camps, and issued an order that any soldier who had an Indian woman should surrender her at once if she of her own free will wished to return home. Many chieftains searched from house to house and persevered until they found them. But there were many women who did not wish to go with their fathers or mothers or husbands, but preferred to remain with the soldiers with whom they were living. Some hid themselves, others said they did not wish to return to idolatry, and yet others were already pregnant. So they did not bring back more than three, who by Cortes' express command were handed over to them.

Everyone was agreed that all the gold and silver and jewels in Mexico should be collected together. But this seems to have amounted to very little. For there was a report that Guatemoc had thrown all the rest into the lake four days before we captured him, and that the Tlascalans and the people of Huexotzingo and Cholula and all the rest of our allies who had taken part in the war, also the *Teules* themselves who went about in the launches, had stolen their share. The officers of the Royal Treasury publicly proclaimed therefore that Guatemoc had hidden the treasure, and that Cortes was delighted since he would not have to give it up but could keep it all for himself. For this reason these officers decided to torture Guatemoc and his cousin the lord of Tacuba, who was his great favourite. Cortes and some of the rest of us were very much distressed that they should torture a prince like Guatemoc for greed of gold. Thorough inquiries about the treasure had been made, and all Guatemoc's stewards had said that there was no more than the king's officials already had, which amounted to three hundred and eighty thousand gold pesos, and had been melted and cast into bars, and mulcted of the royal fifth and another fifth for Cortes. On finding that the sum was so little, Cortes' enemies among the Conquistadors, and Narvaez' men who distrusted him, told the treasurer Julian de Alderete that they suspected him of opposing the arrest and torture of Guatemoc and his captains only because he wanted to keep the gold for

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himself. So, to avoid making any accusations against Cortes, who could not prevent their action, they tortured Guatemoc and the lord of Tacuba by burning their feet with oil, and extorted the confession that four days before they had thrown the gold into the lake, together with the cannon and muskets they had captured from us when they drove us out of Mexico. The place Guatemoc indicated was the palace in which he had lived, where there was a large pond, from which we fished up a great golden sun like the one that Montezuma had given us, and many jewels and articles of small value which belonged to Guatemoc himself. The lord of Tacuba said that in his house at Tacuba, about twelve miles away, he had some gold objects, and that if we would take him there he would tell us where they were buried and give them to us. Pedro de Alvarado and six soldiers, myself among them, took him there. But when we arrived he said he had only told us this story in the hopes of dying on the road, and invited us to kill him, for he possessed neither gold nor jewels. So we returned empty-handed. The truth is that Montezuma's treasure-chamber, of which Guatemoc took possession at his death, did not contain many jewels or golden ornaments, because all the best had been extracted to form the magnificent offering that we had sent to His Majesty, which was worth twice as much as the fifth deducted for him and Cortes' own fifth as well. This we sent to the Emperor by Alonso de Avila, who had just returned from the island of Santo Domingo.

We captains and soldiers were all somewhat sad when we saw how little gold there was and how poor and mean our shares would be. The Mercedarian friar, Pedro de Alvarado, Cristobal de Olid, and other captains told Cortes that since there was so little gold, the entire share that would fall to us ought to be divided among those who were maimed and lame and blind, or had lost an eye or their hearing, and others who were crippled or had pains in their stomachs, or had been burnt by the powder, or were suffering from pains in their sides. They said that it was only right that it should all be given to them, and that the rest of us who were more or less sound ought to approve. After due consideration they repeated this to Cortes,

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believing that he would increase our shares, for there was a strong suspicion that he had hidden all the gold away and ordered Guatemoc to say he had none.

Cortes replied that he would see we came out all right, and would take measures to that effect. As we were all anxious to see what our share would be, we were in a hurry for the accounts to be issued. After making the calculation, they told us a horseman would receive eighty pesos, and a crossbowman, musketeer, or shield-bearer fifty or sixty – I do not remember which – and when we heard this figure not a single soldier was willing to accept his share.

While Cortes was at Coyoacan, he lodged in a palace with whitewashed walls on which it was easy to write with charcoal and ink; and every morning malicious remarks appeared, some in verse and some in prose, in the manner of lampoons. One said the sun, moon, and stars, and earth and sea followed their courses, and if they ever deviated from the plane for which they were created, soon reverted to their original place. So it would be with Cortes' ambition for command. He would soon return to his original condition. Another said that he had dealt us a worse defeat than he had given to Mexico, and that we ought to call ourselves not the victors of New Spain but the victims of Hernando Cortes. Another said he had not been content with a general's share but had taken a king's, not counting other profits; and yet another: 'My soul is very sad and will be till that day when Cortes gives us back the gold he's hidden away.' It was also remarked that Diego Velazquez had spent his whole fortune and discovered all the northern coast as far as Panuco, and then Cortes had come to enjoy the benefit and rebelliously taken both the land and the treasure. And other words were written up too, unfit to record in this story.

When Cortes came out of his quarters of a morning he would read these lampoons. Their style was elegant, the verses well rhymed, and each couplet not only had point but ended with a sharp reproof that was not so naïve as I may have suggested. As Cortes himself was something of a poet, he prided himself on composing answers, which tended to praise his own

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great deeds and belittle those of Diego Velazquez, Grijalva, and Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba. In fact, he too wrote some good verses which were much to the point. But the couplets and sentences they scrawled up became every day more scurrilous, until in the end Cortes wrote: 'A blank wall is a fool's writing paper.' And next morning someone added: 'A wise man's too, who knows the truth, as His Majesty will do very soon!' Knowing who was responsible for this (a certain Tirado, a friend of Diego Velazquez and some others who wished to make their defiance clear) Cortes flew into a rage and publicly proclaimed that they must write up no more libels or he would punish the shameless villains.

Many of us were in debt to one another. Some owed fifty or sixty pesos for crossbows, and others fifty for a sword. Everything we had bought was equally dear. A certain surgeon called Maestre Juan, who tended some bad wounds, charged excessive prices for his cures, and so did a sort of quack by the name of Murcia, who was an apothecary and barber and also treated wounds, and there were thirty other tricks and swindles for which payment was demanded out of our shares. The remedy that Cortes provided was to appoint two trustworthy persons who knew the prices of goods and could value anything that we had bought on credit. An order went out that whatever price was placed on our purchases or the surgeons' cures must be accepted, and that if we had no money, our creditors must wait two years for payment. And I must say that in the end, in compensation for slaves sold by auction, the remaining gold all fell to the King's officials.

When Cortes found that many of the soldiers were still insolently demanding larger shares, and saying that he had stolen everything for himself, and begging him to lend them money, he decided to free himself from their clutches and send them to settle in any province that seemed to him suitable. He ordered Gonzalo de Sandoval to go to settle at Tuxtepec and punish the Mexican garrisons that had killed seventy-eight persons and six Spanish ladies of Narvaez' party who had stayed there. He was to found a town there to be called Medellin, and then to go on to Coatzacoalcos and form a settlement at that port. He

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also ordered one Castaneda and Vicente Lopez to go to conquer the province of Panuco, and Rodrigo Rangel to stay at Villa Rica as before, and Pedro de Ircio with him. He sent Juan Alvarez the younger to Colima, and a certain Villafuerte to Zacatula, and Cristobal de Olid, who had recently married a Portuguese lady, to Michoacan, and he sent Francisco de Orozco to settle in Oaxaca.

When the news spread through all these distant provinces that Mexico was destroyed their *Caciques* and lords could not believe it. However, they sent chieftains to congratulate Cortes on his victories and yield themselves as vassals to His Majesty, and to see if the city of Mexico, which they had so dreaded, was really razed to the ground. They all carried great presents of gold to Cortes, and even brought their small children to show them Mexico, pointing it out to them in much the same way that we would say: 'Here stood Troy.'

But let us leave this topic for another that richly deserves explanation. Many interested readers have asked me why the true Conquistadors who won New Spain and the great and strong city of Mexico did not stay to settle, but went on to other provinces. I think this question is justified, and I will give them an answer. Learning from Montezuma's account-books the names of the places which sent him tributes of gold, and where the mines and chocolate and cotton-cloths were to be found, we decided to go to these places; and our resolve was strengthened when we saw so eminent a captain and so close a friend of Cortes as Gonzalo de Sandoval leaving Mexico, and when we realized that there were no gold or mines or cotton in the towns around Mexico, only a lot of maize and the *maguey* plantations from which they obtained their wine. For this reason we thought of it as a poor land, and went off to colonize other provinces. But we were thoroughly deceived.

I remember that when I went to ask Cortes for leave to go with Sandoval he said to me: 'On my conscience, Señor Bernal Díaz del Castillo, you are making a mistake. I wish you would stay here with me. But as you want to go with your friend Sandoval, go and good luck to you. I shall always consider your wishes, but I know very well that you will be sorry you left.'